

**Perceptions of Role and Identity among
Learning and Teaching Support Staff
in Higher Education: An Institutional
Case Study**

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Abstract

The thesis is a study of the perceptions of role and identity among learning and teaching support staff in a higher education institution in the UK. It considers how these perceptions are shaped and constructed.

The constructs are considered in relation to concepts of social and professional identity and postcolonialism, including the concept of 'third space' working. Policy changes in the higher education sector and their impact on academic and professional services staff identity are also explored.

Designed as a case study, the research analyses a range of qualitative data obtained from institutional documentation, a short survey and interviews with staff members. Issues of methodology and method, including the 'insider-outsider' position of the researcher are discussed.

The data demonstrate that role and identity are closely connected and that they are experienced emotionally, the main conclusion being that professional identity of this group of staff is comparatively weak. This is a source of some negativity for learning and teaching support staff and is contrary to institutional intentions in respect of its professional services staff. The range and variety of role undertaken by this staff group and the expectations of the institution contribute to identity formation, as do the recruitment and training of staff and the way in which they are presented in institutional documentation.

Institutional structures, cultures and working practices influence relationships between academic and support staff which in turn shape identity, which is perceived as constrained or limited by boundaries between staff groups. The persistence of these boundaries is one factor in the lack of the emergence of 'third space' working. A related conclusion is that deliberate actions by the institution would be needed to achieve significant changes in perceptions relating to both role and identity.

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Chapter One: Introduction and research aims

1. 1 Introduction

The change from elite to mass higher education in the UK and the impact of government policies relating to such areas as widening participation and skills development have encouraged explorations of the nature and purposes of higher education. Examination of structures and organisation within universities, and about the effects of the changing environment on learning and teaching has also taken place. Additionally, questioning the role and mission of universities has involved consideration of the roles of their staff and exploration of their identities, and the impact of the changes on values and beliefs, highlighting the different cultures within institutions and the power conflicts that arise when traditional practices are challenged.

Professional services staff form a considerable proportion of university staff in the UK, outnumbering academic staff in some parts of the sector (Barnett, 1992). While there is no agreed definition of 'professional services', typically they provide support for the academic and business activities of universities, their work having expanded considerably over the last few decades in response to changes in the sector driven by political and economic developments. Within these services, staff provide a wide range of learning and teaching related support, often working across teams within their institutions. Despite this, there has been comparatively little published research relating to the roles and identity of these staff, in contrast with the substantial body of literature about the identity of academic staff. Having worked for a number of years, latterly as a senior manager, in teams supporting learning and teaching, I was interested in understanding better the roles and identities of staff providing this support. I was also seeking the opportunity to explore some issues which I was aware of through my own experience but more significantly through those of my colleagues.

1.2 Research Aims

The overarching aim of the research is to explore the perceptions of a set of professional services staff within a single university regarding their role and identity. The focus is on those professional services personnel who contribute to the support and development of learning and teaching.

The primary research aim is to investigate the nature of the constructs of the identities and roles of the specific group of staff, and to find out how these constructs are created. This includes a consideration of roles and their relationship with professional identity, and exploration of how identity is influenced by institutional strategy, policies, structure, and culture. In clarifying these constructs, the aim is to add to the wider field of research into role and identity which has been provoked by the considerable changes in higher education in recent decades. Although there has been a significant amount of research into the role and identity of academic staff, there is less work in this field concerning professional services staff and very little relating specifically to those who support learning and teaching.

A secondary aim relates to my professional practice in the support of learning and teaching in a UK university, an area in which the relationship between academic and professional services staff is crucial since it affects student learning. New roles for learning and teaching support staff involve them in working directly with students, such as teaching them to develop skills required for academic study. Roles also include providing support for academic staff in relation to the facilitation of learning and teaching, such as IT-enhanced teaching. Students are more likely to experience a coherent learning experience where academic and professional services staff work together to provide this, taking a flexible view of role boundaries (Brew 2006).

As the research is based in my own place of work, I hope that some of the research outcomes will be of use within the institution. By providing an increased understanding of staff roles, the research outcomes provide a base of evidence which could be used for developing approaches for professional services and academic staff to work together to facilitate student learning.

1.3 The field of research

Identity and role are complex and contested concepts, and, as Burr (2003) has noted, identity is a social concept that is ‘constructed out of the discourses culturally available to us’ (p.106). The research therefore examines the constructs through the perspective of some of these discourses.

The research study explores what is meant by the term ‘professional services’ and how consistently it is defined. This involves enquiring into the concepts of profession and professionalism, and the concept of ‘services’ in the higher education context, so that the ways in which the terms serve to construct identity can be considered.

A second significant area the research explores relates to the development of roles among professional services staff. In examining the roles and discovering how they contribute to professional identity, I am working in line with Hall’s (1997) belief that we can increase our knowledge of people by understanding their roles better. In relation to this, the research also considers the concept of hybrid or blended roles and the emergence of what Bhabha (1994) has termed ‘third space’, to see how far this exists in the institution being researched. Closely connected with this is the concept of boundary and how it affects identity. The relationship between professional services and academic staff roles is a crucial one in the areas of learning and teaching, and identity thus becomes a significant issue. The changes that have been experienced in the sector in relation to learning and teaching have had an impact on the identity of academic staff that has been widely explored. This exploration has included discussion about the relationship with learning and teaching support staff (Henkel 2005; Trow 2010). The study therefore explores the impact of perceived boundaries on staff identity, and the tensions created by contested and competing identities in hybrid zones. This is significant in the light of recent government policy and funding decisions, and their impact on resources in UK higher education. It will become increasingly necessary for both academic and professional services staff working in universities to be able to facilitate students’ learning in an environment where the focus is on sustainability, but where students’ expectations about their learning experience are rising. This may necessitate some changes in the way in which roles are developed in the future, and discovering the perceptions that exist in

relation to roles and what appetite there is for further change should assist such changes.

The research also examines the cultures of the institution, in particular the perceived tensions between academic, collegial and discipline-focussed culture versus corporate, managerial and bureaucratic culture, and whether there is a wider sense of community that crosses role boundaries, arising from what Deem and Johnson (2000) have termed 'cultural traffic'. This involves an exploration of values and beliefs, and enquiry into issues of esteem.

It also involves exploring the concept of difference in relation to the identities being researched. Postcolonial discourses of exclusion and inclusion, and 'Othering' inform this aspect of the research, and also a consideration of how power is involved in the construction of role and identity. This requires consideration of the dominant discourses relating to learning and teaching and whether they privilege academic staff and, if this is the case, how this impacts on professional services staff. It also involves investigating how power relationships affect, and are in turn affected by, the emergence of 'third space' working, if this exists, and by perceived changes in authority arising from different, possibly more collaborative, ways of working. This consideration is additionally informed by the ideas of Foucault, in particular his views on shifting power and power networks, and the 'apparatus' of institutional power and representation.

1.4 The research questions

The research questions relate to staff perceptions and the ways in which these perceptions have been constructed. Three broad questions are designed to structure the exploration.

Firstly, I am seeking to know what the perceptions are of staff who support learning and teaching in relation their roles and what influences, both within and external to the institution, have led to the formation of these perceptions. To understand this, it is first necessary to find out what these roles involve, so a related question concerns what activities they carry out.

The second, and crucial, question is how their perceptions of role affect their identity, and to enquire what other factors have influenced the constructs of identity among the group.

The final question is whether or not the changes in the sector have led to the emergence of new, more hybrid, roles and identities which straddle traditional barriers for learning and teaching support staff in the institution.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

The next chapter sets out the external context for the research and provides information about the institution in which the case study is set.

This is followed in Chapter Three by a consideration of the literature relating to the research topic. Chapter Four provides an account of the methodology of the research and considers some of the issues relating to the research approach and methods used.

The research findings are presented in Chapter Five and are analysed and discussed in Chapter Six. The conclusions of the research are outlined in Chapter Seven, which also considers the validity and limitations of the research, and possibilities for related future research. Finally, possible steps related to some of the outcomes which could be carried out within the institution researched are considered.

Chapter Two: The external and internal contexts for the research

2.1 The external context

A number of externally driven changes in higher education in the UK have affected the roles and identities of both academic and administrative staff in the sector during the last twenty years. These include increased student numbers from a wider range of backgrounds, the effects of globalisation, government policies aimed at linking higher education more closely with economic development and increased regulation (Taylor, 1999; McNay 2000; Barnett, 2003). The 1997 NCIHE: *Higher Education in the Learning Society* report (widely referred to as the Dearing report) notes that: ‘Over the next 20 years, the roles of staff are likely to change, as they undertake different combinations of functions at different stages of their career’ (Summary Report, para.69), and recommends that universities’ staffing policies should address the issue of changing roles. The report mentions the ‘blurring’ of academic and administrative roles, noting that ‘non-academic’ staff have taken on new functions relating to learning and teaching, but that lack of career opportunities and responsibility without power are causes of frustration for many of these staff. The report also coined the term ‘new professional’ to denote this staff group.

2.1.1 The effects of massification

The Dearing report presents the expected changes in staff roles as arising in part from the introduction of ‘new students’ into higher education, who have different needs and requirements from those of ‘typical’ students. Increasing access has continued to be promoted, *The Future of Higher Education* White Paper (2003), for example, setting out the government’s aim of increasing participation of 18-30 year olds in higher education to 50%. The massification of higher education has had a significant effect on learning and teaching, and thus on the roles of staff (Good, 2001; Barnett, 2003; Trow, 2010). New roles have emerged for professional services staff which lie outside the traditional administrative functions and which have a direct impact on the student learning experience. Such roles include teaching the skills needed for academic work and providing additional academic support. Support and

development for academic staff, for example in relation to IT-enhanced teaching also feature among the new roles. In many ways, massification exemplifies the impact of external policy on higher education staff, raising issues relating to academic autonomy, value and culture conflicts, and the blurring of role boundaries. The role of professional services staff in implementing and supporting policy relating to widening participation, for example, can be viewed, as by Greenbank (2007), as demonstrating that externally driven institution-wide policy conflicts with departmental objectives, values and complexity. Similarly, the increase in the number of students and the range of their backgrounds is one factor that has led to the increased involvement in learning and teaching activities for professional services staff, particularly in the area of academic support. External policy has thus led to re-consideration of their roles, which in turn has affected perceptions of their professional identity. (Corral and Lester, 1996; Browne and Beetham, 2010). While massification can be seen as providing this group of staff with opportunities both for supporting learning and for teaching, it has also proved to be a source of some conflict and stress since the effects of changes in their roles have not been confined to their own staff groupings.

2.1.2 The economic imperative

Government policy aimed at increasing the link between higher education and the growth of the national economy has also raised questions relating to role and identity, including the purpose and identity of universities themselves as their traditional values are brought into question. Evans (2002), for example, questions whether the advancement of truth can still hold as an aim in higher education when the government is focussing on 'practical skills applicable in the industrial and business context of the moment' (p.42). The increased policy focus on national and global economies and the skills needed to deliver growth, as exemplified by the Leitch *Review of Skills* report (2006) and the government's *Higher Ambitions* paper (2009), have led to the rise of discourses in higher education which are seen to place less value on specialism and discipline-based knowledge and more on generic or transferable skills, such as employability and entrepreneurial skills. Since professional services staff are often involved in work that promotes these discourses, which conflict with the traditional ones, this can result in the staff being viewed as

unaware of, or unsympathetic to, academic cultures and values, and as overly bureaucratic (Hatcher *et al*, 1993 Deem 1998).

At the same time, while policies aimed at developing such skills have been perceived as providing role development opportunities by some professional services staff, they are not always viewed positively, either by them or by academic staff. Some 'non-academic' staff surveyed for the Dearing report commented that such work lay outside their role descriptions and added to the work expected of them, but brought them no rewards, while some academic staff have seen the opportunities for professional services staff as a threat to their own role and identity, diminishing their discipline-based authority.

Increasingly, universities' 'missions' reflect government priorities relating to the economy, globalisation and a more market-focussed view of the role of higher education, leading to the adoption of managerial structures and practices formerly found in business rather than in education. Rhoades (2005), commenting on US universities, remarks on the creation of centres and institutions which lie outside academic control and which are designed to assist market engagement, a pattern which can also be found increasingly in UK universities. This in turn affects academic and professional services roles, often leading to value-related conflicts as corporate and collegial cultures come into opposition. Kogan (2000), for example, sees professionalism itself being challenged since its constituents 'sit at odds with the kinds of behavioural directions and prescriptive frames laid down by Government-inspired actions and policies' (p.31). The increasing complexity of UK higher education institutions has arguably benefitted professional services staff by offering them opportunities for role development and increased involvement in decision-making. The need to increase income from a range of sources has also led to expansion in both staff numbers and role responsibilities. For example, the increase in overseas student numbers has required additional staff resource to support recruitment, orientation and English language teaching for students whose first language is not English. The planning and delivery of short courses aimed at encouraging employers to deliver their staff development through universities has also offered opportunities to professional services staff, both in the administration and in the delivery of such courses.

2.1.3 The impact of dedicated funding for the ‘enhancement’ of learning and teaching

State funding has also affected the number of professional services staff and their role development. Teaching Quality Enhancement Funding, introduced by the Higher Education Funding Council in 1999, ring-fenced funds aimed at raising the status of learning and teaching in higher education, and promoting the development of institutional learning and teaching strategies which would include innovative approaches. These strategies included the increased use of IT, and activities to develop students’ employability and transferable skills. The funding also encouraged the introduction in the sector of institution-wide projects relating to student learning, in some cases in response to student opinion obtained through the National Student Survey, with regard to such aspects of their learning experience as assessment and feedback. This dedicated funding encouraged the recruitment and transfer of staff with specialist and administrative skills to support the enhancement agenda. The funding of Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) in 74 universities in 2005 had a similar effect. The CETLs, like the large-scale projects, also provided an opportunity for academic staff and professional services staff to work closely together, outside their usual roles.

2.1.4 Approaches to learning and teaching

Changes in the way higher education is ‘delivered’, including the growth of IT support and of the ‘enterprise culture’, are also mentioned in the 1997 Dearing report as reasons for role development, with administrative and support staff commenting on their increased involvement in ‘teaching functions’ as opposed to the administration of courses, arising largely from the delegation of tasks by academic staff as student numbers rise. An increasing focus on independent learning is also presented as a reason for the inclusion in support staff’s roles of increased guidance and direction for students’ learning. While it can be argued that this is one of the effects of growth in student numbers, pedagogic practice is affected by discourses of

learning, not simply economic factors, the increased interest in independent student learning being one example of this.

In many institutions, including research-intensive universities, there has also been a slight shift towards placing a greater value on learning and teaching, which has traditionally been viewed as the 'poor relation' of research, despite the fact that teaching income often indirectly supports research activity. This shift can be seen in the mission statement of such institutions as well as in their staff recruitment policies and publicity. These changes challenge traditional views of role and identity of both professional services and academic staff.

The annual National Student Survey has also led to changes in learning and teaching as universities respond to the outcomes of the survey. Since the survey outcomes have an impact on universities 'league tables' and thus on recruitment, this has led to pressure to adapt delivery with a view to increasing student satisfaction and to identify good and poor practice with a view to sharing and embedding the former and reducing the latter. Through acting as a driver for improvements the survey has thus had an impact on the work of professional services staff, for example in providing staff development or introducing improved quality monitoring processes. The focus on the improvement of the student learning experience has made it possible for professional services staff to move into new areas of work, sometimes in collaboration with academic staff. In this work they have taken on a number of roles, some of which overlap with those traditionally carried out by academic staff, including curriculum design and programme delivery.

Opportunities for leading developmental work, as opposed to supporting the work of academic staff, have also increased. Evidence of this can be seen in the increased number of conference papers and journal articles written by professional services staff, sometimes in collaboration with academic staff, which reflect government policy in relation to higher education. Similarly, academic and professional services staff increasingly work together on innovations relating to learning and teaching related activities, which also contributes to role overlap. Cour's (2001) report for the Association of University Teachers (AUT), the stated rationale for which was: 'ensuring that higher education is managed and delivered in a spirit of teamwork and collegiality, not elitism and managerialism' (p.2), argues that this collaboration and

role overlap can be seen as ‘non-academic’ staff become increasingly involved in co-delivery rather than support. Although the report was aimed at seeking parity of pay for academic and support staff and may therefore be considered as having a particular perspective, the survey outcomes referred to in the report show that the staff surveyed perceived themselves as ‘surrogate academics’ because of the role changes they were experiencing.

2.1.5 The increase in regulation

The assurance of quality in learning and teaching is perhaps the area where policy has had the most visible impact on the role of professional services staff and which has brought their work under scrutiny. The increase in external regulation, managed by the Quality Assurance Agency, has affected both professional services and academic staff, increasing the amount of time that has to be spent on evidence collecting and the presentation of data for quality assurance purposes. While this can be seen as an extension of the administrative work that professional services staff have traditionally carried out, it differs from this in a significant respect by being initiated or directed less by academic staff and more by staff whose roles include responsibility for leading on the development and implementation of policies and systems to meet the external quality requirements. Such responsibilities exist in relation to other areas of professional services staff’s work, but this one affects considerable numbers of academic staff and is generally perceived by them as burdensome. Rhoades (2005) is not alone in seeing external policy leading to an increase in the number of non-academic staff, and thus to a shift of power to ‘management’. In the view of some academic staff, the increased quality requirements have led to a transfer of power, a diminishing of their autonomy and a corresponding increase in managerialism and bureaucracy (Malcolm and Zukas, 2000; Rowland, 2002). The need for quality assurance may not be perceived as necessary by some staff since, as Becher and Trowler (2001) have noted:

‘membership of the academic profession in elite departments is defined in terms of excellence in scholarship and originality in research, and not in any significant degree in terms of teaching capability’ (p. 28).

It is thus not surprising that the work of staff with a specific role focus on quality assurance is sometimes viewed negatively and that there is nostalgia among some academic staff as expressed by Deem (1998) for ‘the rather “hands-off” but also “gentlemanly” governance practices which were once widespread’ (p.48).

2.1.6 The management of learning and teaching

While learning and teaching were traditionally managed solely by academics in UK universities, this is now changing. Senior management teams may include service directors whose briefs include learning and teaching related responsibilities. Strategic and operational decision-making relating to learning and teaching used to be conducted through a committee structure consisting of academic staff, whereas professional services staff are now often committee members, rather than simply providers of secretarial support. The increase in the number of separately managed units staffed by professional services within institutions, some of which are dedicated solely to student learning, such as skills centres, also mean that academic decisions are not made by academic staff alone (Deem 1998; Hellawell and Hancock, 2001).

2.1.7 The emergence of ‘professional services’

As Cour’s report suggests, the changes experienced in the higher education sector have had consequences in relation to the way staff are identified. As roles have emerged or changed for staff who are not academics, it has become more difficult to categorise neatly the groups of staff who support and develop learning and teaching. Cour is not alone in commenting on the range of names used for this group of staff, such as ‘non-academic’, ‘academic-related’, ‘professional services’, ‘support’, or ‘other’, to name a few, which reflects this difficulty. Additionally, across different institutions, and even within single ones, there may not be agreement as to what posts and roles such terms relate to. The proliferation of names for staff groups and for individual post titles within the groups is found in many universities, and has been encouraged by government funding for the ‘enhancement’ of learning and teaching which has led to the creation of additional posts. Organisational structures

have been affected by the increase in role variety and the ways in which learning and teaching are planned, administered and supported, and teams of staff working in these posts are among those increasingly referred to as ‘professional services’. Professional services supporting learning and teaching include both administrative and specialist staff, whose roles may be complex and interlinked across the different service areas, and whose work sometimes overlaps with that of academic staff, leading to lack of certainty or tensions about boundaries. Professional services provide support for a wide range of learning-related activities for both students and staff, and although the term ‘professional services’ implies a coherent group, this is not necessarily reflected in practice.

My positionality on the role and identity of professional services staff with a learning and teaching support remit is in part affected by my experiences of working in this area. I am broadly in agreement with the view that the changes in the sector referred to above have affected the type of work that such staff are required to carry out, and that this has led to an increase in opportunities for some staff, in particular those in managerial posts. However, I am also aware that for both academic and professional services colleagues there is a loss of certainty with regard to new roles and conflicting identities which has led in some cases to polarised positions being taken. These aspects both influenced the research aims.

2.2 Overview of the institution

2.2.1 Background and key features of the institution

The institution where the research was carried out is a large post-1992 university, located in the north of England, whose origins date back to the early nineteenth century. The institution supports a broad base of disciplines, offering taught courses at foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate levels, the undergraduate programmes predominating. Research degrees are offered in some subject areas but this is not a key feature of the institution. The institution was previously a polytechnic and this is reflected in the courses offered, many of which are vocationally and professionally oriented. The development of employability and work-related skills is a key feature of the institution’s mission and many of its courses reflect this in both subject and

content. Continuous professional development (CPD) courses are also offered in a number of areas, including health-related subjects.

The institution views itself as an important contributor to civic and regional ambitions for development. A considerable proportion of the university's students come from the region and over 40% fall into the mature student category. Almost 30% study part-time and approximately 12% of students are from overseas. A number of collaborative partners in the UK and overseas also deliver courses leading to an award of the university, either through a franchise, validation or other arrangement.

The university has a split-location campus within one city. Future planning includes the intention of reducing the number of locations. Faculties and professional services staff do not generally share buildings but are located separately. Learning and teaching support staff are not co-located but are either in library/student support areas or in administrative office blocks. However, some of them, depending on their roles, spend a proportion of their time working in the Faculties.

There are approximately 2,600 staff of whom just under half are academics. Professional services staff are not differentiated from other services and administrative staff for reporting purposes so an exact total figure is not calculable. Similarly, since many professional services staff have mixed roles it is not possible to calculate the exact number involved in learning and teaching support but a rough estimate would suggest around that one hundred staff members across the professional services teams support learning and teaching.

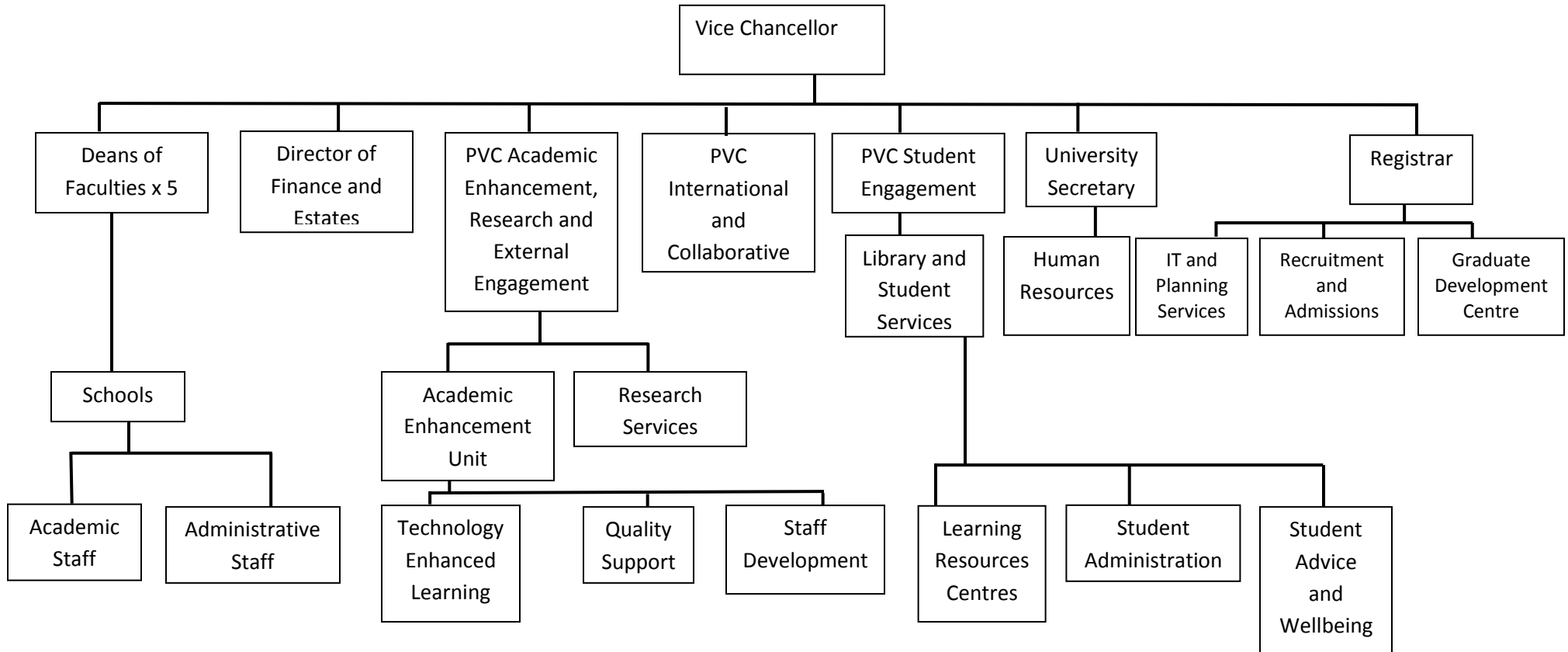
2.2.2 Structure and governance: learning and teaching perspective

The university consists of five faculties, each led by a dean, and a number of centralised services (*fig. 1*). The senior strategic management group, which includes the deans, and the senior academic committee report to the Vice-Chancellor and the CEO, who in turn report to the governing body. The heads of services, including services supporting learning and teaching, report to the Pro-Vice Chancellors (PVCs) with institution-wide remits in the senior strategic management group. Support for learning and teaching is described in the institution's organisational structure (2010-2011) as being provided through two areas, namely the Academic Enhancement Unit

and Student Experience, which includes Library and Student Support, the Graduate Development Centre, and Student Advice and Wellbeing. Each faculty also has a number of staff who support learning and teaching, as part or all of their role. The number and role of these staff varies across the faculties, but responsibilities include programme related administration, skills development, IT support and quality assurance.

The governance of learning and teaching is managed through a committee structure which has recently been revised. Faculty sub-committees dealing with quality and enhancement, and institution-wide sub-committees dealing with collaborative activities, external examining and programme validation and review all report to the main learning and teaching committee, which in turn reports to the Academic Board. The majority of these are chaired by senior academic staff but two sub-committees are chaired by senior professional services managers.

Figure 1: Institutional Structure Chart



2.3. Learning and teaching in the institution

2.3.1 Strategy

The university's 2007-2012 Strategic Plan presents learning, teaching and assessment as one of four equally important 'core business' processes. Implementation of the Plan is intended to be achieved through work of the faculties and the service teams, using local plans based on the overarching institutional objectives and strategic initiatives. Strong emphasis is consistently laid in all documentation relating to learning and teaching on the enhancement of the student learning experience, and key learning and teaching objectives include research-informed curricula, support for student learning and preparation for employment. The professional development of staff who 'teach and support learning' is also prioritised, as is the use of technology for enhancement purposes.

Related to the Strategic Plan, a five-year Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy for the same period, which is reviewed and revised on an annual basis, sets out a number of objectives which are broadly focussed on the enhancement of the student learning experience. Faculties and relevant professional services departments prepare related local plans which are also reviewed on annual basis and reported to faculty and institution level committees.

In addition to the formal committee structure mentioned above, both long and short term working groups with cross-institutional membership exist to support learning and teaching related activities. At institutional level, learning and teaching related forums, led by professional services staff, also provide an opportunity for academic and professional services staff to meet and discuss academic issues. Similar forums exist within some of the faculties.

2.3.2 The status of learning and teaching in the institution

Although the university is not a research-intensive institution, research has a high status in comparison with learning and teaching. However, a significant proportion of the

academic staff is not involved in active research, in some cases because staff members have a full teaching timetable or because they do not have research training and a doctoral level qualification.

Despite learning and teaching being the predominant academic activity, there are very few National Teaching Fellows in the institution and a limited number of academic staff with teaching qualifications or Higher Education Academy accreditation. Only one of the institution's professors has obtained their chair on the strength of their learning and teaching, although criteria are in place for readerships and chairs to be awarded on this basis.

The institution is involved in a major national learning and teaching related research project although it is too early to tell what impact this will have internally. Both academic and professional services staff are involved in smaller external projects. An annual learning and teaching conference is held but is not well supported by senior staff and attendance is limited. Similarly, only small numbers of staff attend learning and teaching related development sessions, except in the faculty which includes Education. A learning and teaching research journal previously existed but has withered. The overall impression therefore is that scholarship and discourse related to learning and teaching are not highly regarded.

2.3.3 Quality management

Quality related work is presented as focussing on enhancement, in accordance with the Strategic Plan. However, in practice the main emphasis has been on achieving compliance with quality process requirements, since practices vary in this respect across the faculties. A recent Institutional Audit highlighted some weaknesses in relation to standards in collaborative provision which has also led to an increased emphasis on consistent practice across the whole institution.

Policy documents and process models and guidance are produced by professional services staff, mostly those working in the Academic Enhancement Unit or in the

student administration team within Library and Student Support. These staff also have responsibility for providing training for the processes and monitoring their implementation and review.

Until recently, quality assurance was supported by staff in separate faculty and central teams. Support is now mainly provided by a central team whose staff divide their working time between the central office and the faculties, with the aim of achieving a more consistent approach to quality assurance at the same time as rationalising staff resource. Quality assurance is overseen through faculty and institution level committees whose members consist of academic and professional service staff, and which allow for cross-faculty consultation.

2.3.4 Responsibilities of professional services staff in relation to the enhancement of the student learning experience

The remit of the Academic Enhancement Unit and Library and Student Support relates to quality assurance, the enhancement of learning and teaching, including technology-enhanced learning, library services, student skills and study support, and staff development.

While the Academic Enhancement Unit works closely with the student union, the unit's services are mostly staff-facing. The Academic Practice team and the Technology Enhanced Learning team, located in the Academic Enhancement Unit, help to implement the institutional, faculty and departmental level strategic development of learning and teaching. The Academic Practice team provides advice and guidance, through a range of activities from the planning and delivery of the university's annual learning and teaching conference to one-to-one advice sessions related to the improvement of teaching. Both teams plan and deliver generic and bespoke learning and teaching development for all staff. The Academic Practice team has responsibility for the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, which is co-taught with staff from the faculties. The team also delivers a number of other short

initial professional development programmes and supports staff to achieve Higher Education Academy fellowships at all levels. It engages with cross-sector enhancement projects and supports staff in making external enhancement funding bids.

The TEL team provides briefing, training and support for staff in the use of a range of learning and teaching technologies. It is responsible for the development of the university's Virtual Learning Environment, for providing support to students via a helpdesk, and for training and supporting staff in its use. A separate staff development team located within the Academic Enhancement Unit provides a broader range of support for all staff of the university, which may indirectly relate to aspects of learning and teaching development, one example being tailored support for programme leaders.

Library and Student Support also offer some support for staff but are mainly student-facing, providing library services, including information skills development and computing support and student administration. The services are offered through the three Learning Resources Centres which are located on different parts of the campus and through online support.

Student Advice and Wellbeing offer a range of services, some of which relate to the student learning experience, including English language support for international students and academic skills development for all students, as well as specific support for those with learning disabilities, such as dyslexia.

The Graduate Development Centre also has student support as its main focus, while providing some advice and guidance for staff, particularly in relation to including work-related skills in the curriculum. The remit of the Graduate Development Centre is to prepare students for employment, directly through skills development, such as writing CVs and preparing for interviews, through offering opportunities for work experience and through working with academic staff to embed employability into the curriculum, particularly at Level 4. The staff in this area also liaise extensively with employers, particularly in the city and region.

The Academic Enhancement Unit, the Graduate Development Centre and Student Advice and Wellbeing are all located in an office block which contains other administrative services.

2.4 Summary

Higher education has been affected by developments outside the sector and by the policies of successive governments. The increase in the number of students entering higher education, including an increased number of international students and those entering as a result of the widening participation agenda, is a significant factor in this respect, as are the changes to the way higher education is funded and the focus on the development of skills for employment. Traditional boundaries are thus weakening as roles adapt to meet the new demands and this can lead to tensions as power shifts occur. Changing values and challenges to long-standing status and academic discipline-related authority create uncertainty, making the spaces in which hybrid roles may emerge exciting, but unsettling.

Within the institution the effects of these changes are being felt and responses have included re-structuring and refocusing the roles and responsibilities of those professional services teams whose remit includes learning and teaching support. The focus on both the enhancement and the quality assurance of the student learning experience suggests that the role and identity of professional services staff will be affected.

Chapter Three: Review of literature relating to the research topic

There is a limited amount of research and writing relating specifically to professional services staff in higher education, as noted below. In order to explore the roles and identity of professional services staff in relation to learning and teaching, I have therefore considered several broader areas of research and writing. These include conceptual and theoretical viewpoints which illuminate the research topic, views on profession and professionalism, research and opinions on identity and community among academic staff and their relationship with professional services staff, the changing nature of higher education, particularly in the UK, and the development of new and hybrid identities.

3.1 Conceptual perspectives

The research topic crosses a number of areas, which partially overlap or relate to one another. Several theoretical concepts are therefore valuable in relation to both the research questions and the analysis of the findings.

While there is a considerable amount of literature relating to the psychological aspects of identity, the nature of my research questions has led me to focus on research and writing on the sociological aspects of identity and role. The psychological aspects of identity are therefore not considered in relation to the research being undertaken, although these are acknowledged as being worth a separate exploration. I chose to consider the sociological aspects, since I was exploring the social context in which identity and role are situated. In the words of Lawler (2008): ‘identity is profoundly social and is continually interpreted and reinterpreted’ (p.17).

3.1.1 Sociological aspects of identity

From the sociological perspective, identity is perceived as complex, contested and dependent on social relationships (Brah, 1996; Hall, 1997; Woodward, 1997; Crow and Maclean, 2006). Additionally, the concept of identity as being ever-changing, plural and even ‘fractured’ (Kidd, 2000), is widely found in theories about social identity and is summarised by Hall (2000) as ‘a construction, a process never completed – always in process’ (p.16).

Identity formation is not seen simply as a matter of individuals’ apprehension of their personal characteristics and values, but as being shaped by the social world they inhabit. This suggests that within a group of staff, personal identity will be affected by the communities the staff member ‘belongs to’ as well as by the other communities with which they interact. Holmes (2010) summarises this view by noting that identity must always be affirmed, or disaffirmed, by others. The identity of a community is influenced by its history, culture and values. However, these may not be overtly described and discussed by community members. While there is also a view that shared career backgrounds encourage strong shared identities, for professional services staff, in contrast to academic staff, this shared background often does not exist. Crow and Maclean (2006) point out that place and interest may be what is shared, and to these can be added work roles and activities (Becker, 1970). The comparative lack of literature relating to professional staff identity may be partly explained by the attention given to the roles, activities and tasks for this group of staff, as opposed to the more abstract concepts related to identity.

Community, and thus identity, is also seen as arising in part from classification systems (Woodward, 1997). From this viewpoint, the classification of staff into a group named ‘professional services’ will affect the way in which the group perceives itself and is perceived, and will affect the way its members behave. However, the meaning the classification assigns is not identically interpreted and understood, either by those within or outside the groupings. While a shared, albeit debated, understanding of the

classification of ‘academic’ staff emerges in books and journal articles about identity in higher education institutions, this is not the case with professional services staff.

Whitchurch (2006), for example, notes the lack of official data on the composition of non-academic staff groupings.

Classification and the culture of communities are also presented in the literature as resulting in the creation of boundaries between social groups (Hall, 1997; Woodward, 1997; Gilroy, 1997). The perception of difference is seen as having the potential for both a positive and negative impact on identity. The boundary zone where ‘hybrid’ identities can emerge is seen as empowering and challenging, and this is discussed in more detail below in relation to professional services staff identity. However, taken to an extreme, classification is viewed as resulting in stereotyping (Hall, 1997) which can in turn lead to ‘Othering’, which is also discussed in more detail below (3.1.4) in relation to postcolonial theories.

3.1.2 Social constructionism

Social constructionism views identity as a social concept which, according to Burr (2003), is ‘constructed out of the discourses culturally available to us’ (p .106). This view sees varying discourses offering alternative visions of what identities mean. These discourses ‘address us as particular kinds of people’ (p. 111), which Burr considers we can accept or resist, and which may be disempowering. Social constructionism also views people as being actively engaged in the creation of their own phenomenal world. I take this to mean that people are not passive recipients of the identities which arise from the prevailing discourses, but that they contribute to, support or resist and thus develop these discourses. This echoes Foucault’s view of discourses and power, which I refer to below (3.1.5). I hoped the research would enable me to explore with professional services staff their relationship with the dominant discourses in the social context in which they work.

3.1.3 Social identity theories

Tajfel (1978) defines social identity as:

‘that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group or groups, together with the value and emotional significance attached to that group membership’ (p.63).

The identity relationships between individuals and groups are the focus of social identity theories, one aspect of which is summarised by Haslam *et al* (2003): ‘Identification ... blurs the distinction between self and group, and turns the group, psychologically, into part of the self’ (p.31). I consider this to provide a useful perspective on the perceptions of identity among the group which is the focus of this research, in particular with reference to weak identification. Social identity theories (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) see membership as not being limited to one group, although in a work context, the primary work group is viewed as the key focus of identity. The shared understanding of the definitions and boundaries of the group help to shape identity, which suggests to me that if these are not clearly understood, group identity will be weakened. However, Haslam *et al* (2003) point out that people need to feel that boundaries are permeable. Membership of a group will tend to highlight similarities within the group and external differences. Clearly, this may have positive and negative effects. High-status groups tend to exhibit most group bias, which has implications for groups which are perceived as being of lower status.

An aspect of these theories which I consider particularly relevant is the extent to which individuals will associate themselves with a group that is perceived to have low status or power, and the strategies they will use in these circumstances. For example, they may try to deny membership or to gain membership of a more socially dominant group, or a group may compete with the more dominant one. The impact on self-esteem of group membership is also significant. The impact of structures and of induction into a group also become relevant as do group history and shared experience which contribute to understanding of norms, all of which I believe have implications for institutions and groups where restructuring is frequent.

3.1.4 Difference, postcolonial theories and identity

A view of identity summarised by Hall (1997) and Woodward (1997), which acknowledges its relational nature, where one identity relies on the existence of another and where difference is a defining factor, provides another useful perspective for considering the identities of professional services staff. Hall describes difference as being essential to meaning but warns of the dangers of binary opposition, which provides an oversimplified view and can lead to stereotyping, where identity is too closely associated with role or with a limited number of character traits.

Difference is also at the heart of postcolonial theories, which allow for exploration of identity in relation to concepts of culture, power and difference. While postcolonialism has been particularly associated with the critique of literature, it has a base in political and social theorising and is perceived by some writers (Hoogvelt, 2001; Appadurai, 1993) to be a discourse of identity which has emerged as a result of global capitalism. Rizvi *et al* (2006) see postcolonialism as focussing on the particular, as opposed to the universalising tendency of globalisation. It can also be seen to share some aspects of postmodernist thinking, such as the increase in social fragmentation, pluralism and individualism, and the decline of dominant cultures (Giddens, 1991).

Postcolonial discourse challenges the ‘colonial’ view of binary opposition between cultures, and the hegemony of a dominant culture. (Said, 1995; Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1993, 1999; Hall, 2000). Identity is seen as shifting and hybrid, particularly where cultural boundaries meet and overlap. In postcolonial literature, power is also viewed as shifting, while echoing Foucauldian views on the legitimization of power through acceptance. The dominant culture is seen as tending to restriction, but not necessarily resulting in oppression. The Gramscian view of hegemonic ideas being internalised by the dominated, thus maintaining the asymmetrical power relationship achieved through the legitimization of the dominant discourse, is acknowledged but challenged in the work of Fanon (1967a, 1967b), Freire (1985, 1997), Phillipson (1992) and Rizvi *et al* (2006), the latter commenting that postcolonialism refuses to see the ‘colonised’ as ‘cultural dupes’ (p.256). Rizvi *et al* recognise that ‘colonizers’ are shaped by, as well as shaping, the ‘colonized’ and writers such as Bhabha (1994) and Hoogvelt (2001) offer a

perspective on difference which presents hybridity as providing an opportunity to negotiate difference and thus power relationships.

With regard to the area being researched, I wanted to explore whether this perspective could shed light on the academic-professional services divide that was presented in writing about higher education communities and their identities, and whether professional services staff members' perceptions about their role and identity would suggest that they were 'colonised' or 'Othered'. Postcolonial theories resist the view of difference as a rationale for 'Othering' where non-dominant groups or individuals are perceived as being outside a social 'norm' (Fanon, 1967a, 1967b; Phillipson, 1992; Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1995; Hall, 2000). Hall points out that identities are constructed across 'often intersecting, and antagonistic, discourses, practice and positions' (p.17), which I consider accurately reflects the context in which professional services staff work.

An aspect of postcolonial theories which is particularly relevant to a consideration of learning and teaching support staff relates to the concepts of 'Othering', boundaries and 'third space'. 'Third space' is seen as a supplementary space that emerges at the boundaries between two different cultures, allowing those in the space to go beyond 'originary and initial subjectivities' (Bhabha, 1994: p.1) and enabling difference to be articulated and reconciled. From this perspective, hybrid zones can be viewed either as dangerous because they threaten the boundaries that some may wish to preserve, or liberating because they provide opportunities for the development of 'third space', which is viewed as a highly dynamic space, reflecting changes taking place in the cultures around it. Bhabha (1994) sees identity as being constructed 'within the play of power and exclusion' (p. 18) and describes third space as 'the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference' (p.2) where hybridity can develop. He perceives third space as allowing cultural negotiation to take place, since no discourse predominates in such spaces, leading to the authorisation of cultural hybridity. In particular, this enables the minority, or subaltern, culture to be articulated. He argues that in third space, cultural difference 'serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge' (1990, p. 312) and seeks to introduce new discourses of meaning and identity through negotiation 'where no discursive authority can be established without

revealing the difference of itself' (p.313). Bhabha views such spaces as allowing escape from the 'fixity' of 'Otherness' which colonial discourse seeks to preserve, making it possible for 'new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation' (p. 1) to be developed.

This view has been discussed in relation to higher education cultures and identities by Whitchurch (2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2012) and is discussed in more detail in the section on professional staff identities below. However, comments on the use of names for support staff are significant in this regard, with Gornall (1999) commenting that it is: 'rather unusual that ... a large part of the sector is swept up and grouped together in an essentially negative category' (p.44). The use of the term 'non-academic staff', which is now less frequently used, or 'nonfaculty' (Rhoades, 1996) provides an example of 'Othering' where staff are negatively defined as outside, by not being part of, the academic group. Conway (2000), commenting on the use of this term in Australian higher education, states that it is regarded as 'demeaning' and that it 'suggests that administrators need an academic benchmark to define themselves and their work'. While 'support staff' is more positive, Gornall (1999) notes that it: 'retains an upstairs/downstairs flavour' (p.44) and does not sufficiently differentiate between staff working in a wide range of areas. Whitchurch (2007) considers that the range of terms used is a key problem in relation to perceptions about roles, particularly for professional managers.

3.1.5 Knowledge, discourse and power

In exploring identities, it is also necessary to take account of the epistemologies and discourses which underlie their formation and maintenance. Berger and Luckmann (1966; 1991) consider the relationship between knowledge and the social context in which it exists. Like Foucault and Bourdieu, they see knowledge and social reality as continually informing and developing each other. They view role as being formed by the development of shared knowledge which contains typification of social action within a

given context and note that this is affected by, and in turn affects, the social environment in which it is located:

‘The typology of knowers and non-knowers, like the ‘knowledge’ that is supposed to pass between them, is a matter of social definition’ (p.88).

Roles, like knowledge, are thus socially defined and role induction will therefore include induction into the ‘norms’, values and, Berger and Luckmann argue, the emotions of the social context. Roles exist in relationship to others and can be enforced, and thus represent a form of ‘institutional order’ (p.92). The roles imply shared goals and specific actions for the role holder and lead to the development of the ‘social self’ (p.90) of the role holder.

Knowledge is also viewed as a key factor in professionalism, Macdonald (1995) noting that for knowledge-based occupations, such as professions: ‘the nature of their knowledge, the socio-cultural evolution of their knowledge and ... strategies in handling their knowledge base are of central importance’(p.160).

Like Becker (1970), who comments on the importance of the names of occupations, Berger and Luckmann also note the importance of language and its symbolic representation, as does Woodward (1997). They comment on the vocabularies that emerge from the typifications of forms of action and their effects on role. I believe this can be seen in the area I have researched, where in relation to terms used about learning and teaching this might be exemplified by the use of the word ‘enhancement’ and the impact it has on the roles of the people who engage with it.

The power of discourse is also discussed by Bernstein (1996) who notes that discourses can only exist in relation to each other. He compares power, which creates and legitimises boundaries and categories, and works between them, with control, which establishes legitimate forms of communication appropriate to the different categories and socializes individuals into these relationships. To preserve them, categories are ‘insulated’ by power. In his view, the classificatory system creates order and any contradictions are suppressed by the ‘insulation’: ‘Silence carries the message of power’

(p. 20). He also comments that where the relation between categories is weak, the social network needs to be strong. In relation to education he argues that:

‘Pedagogic discourse is a recontextualizing principle ... which selectively appropriates, relocates, refocuses and relates other discourses to its own order’ (p.47).

Foucault (ed. Gordon, 1980) considers that discourses exist in any given social context, including ‘disqualified’, ‘subjugated’ and ‘illegitimate’ knowledge which challenges the ‘normalising’ discourses. This provides a useful perspective on discourses relating to knowledge in higher education, where those relating to traditional disciplinary knowledge are increasingly challenged by others. Postmodern discourses, for example, are seen by Becher and Trowler (2001) as ‘undermining the authority of particular forms of knowledge’ (p.271).

Fournier (1998) comments on the discourse of ‘lack’ among the marginalised, which includes ‘lack’ of power. For Foucault, knowledge and power are inextricably linked. He sees power as producing knowledge and underlying the formation of discourses; it is therefore not repressive but is a creative force. At the same time, ‘knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power’ (Foucault, ed. Gordon, 1968, p.69). Foucault views the wielding and acceptance of power as a ‘contract’, with problems occurring when the contract is exceeded. It could be argued that in higher education institutions, the contract has been challenged by the emergent discourses. Power for Foucault is a ‘net-like organisation’ (Foucault, ed. Gordon, 1968, p. 98) where individuals both exercise and are subjected to power, which in turn is interlinked with other relations. Resistance is seen as an intrinsic aspect of power in this conceptualisation.

While Foucault’s views on discourse and power informed some of the survey questions and the areas explored in interview, I made limited overt use of his ideas about power referred to in the preceding paragraph. However, discourse and power relate to other concepts, for example those which form part of postcolonial theories, and therefore were considered during the data analysis.

Research and writing about identities and communities in higher education show issues relating to discourse and power as being deeply significant to the academic community. I therefore wanted to see if this would emerge as an equally significant issue for professional services staff in the institution I was researching.

3.2 The changing nature of higher education, knowledge, values and identities

The impact of change on higher education communities is a common theme in the more recent writing relating to the field of cultures and identities in the sector. Among the writers discussing these changes several, such as Good (2001), Barnett (2003), and Trow (2010), have linked them to the move from elite to mass higher education, and have noted the difficulties involved in defining the role of both universities and academic staff in an increasingly complex environment, and the impact the changes have had on traditional values. Trow's view on the impact of this on learning and teaching is that it emphasises: 'the transmission of skill and knowledge' (p.96), and increasing reliance on technology enhanced learning. This viewpoint includes a focus on the effects on staff, particularly academic staff, and on the adaptations they have needed to make to their teaching. McNay (2000), for example, has described the impact of economic policies and the enterprise culture on higher education's own cultures, in particular on the autonomy of academic staff and on the increasingly "client"-focussed role of "administrative" staff. Taylor (1999) has noted that the purposes of higher education have been challenged by government policies relating to globalisation and the need for higher level skills, as identified in the Leitch Review (2006), seeing this as being a reason for the blurring of boundaries between groups of staff and the weakening of academic community and culture. Where change is the theme, professional services staff tend to be mentioned in connection with the effect of external policy changes on academic staff roles.

A considerable number of writers, including Hatcher *et al* (1999), Becher and Trowler (2001), Good (2001), Taylor *et al* (2002), Henkel (2005), Strike (2005), Winter (2009) and Elkington and Lawrence (2012), argue from a postmodernist viewpoint that there

has been a radical change in the nature of the social system over the last two decades and that a focus on consumption and consumers, as opposed to production, has emerged which has led to lifestyle becoming a feature of identity and social hierarchy. They believe this has affected the conceptualisation of higher education, where the liberal humanist concept of the collegial university has been replaced by a 'managerialist' one, leading among other things to loss of autonomy, the pressures of market economy, the growth of technology and 'performativity' and the importance of efficiency. As in the work of Berger and Luckmann (1966), this acknowledges the relationship between knowledge and social environment:

'What needs to be acknowledged is the part played by social processes, epistemological communities and collective change in the development of knowledge' (p. 60).

Wenger *et al* (2002) also recognize that shared domains of knowledge confer power. This perspective sees challenges to discipline-based knowledge, for example from work-based knowledge, leading to a 'shift in power relations in who defines what knowledge is useful' (p.55) where socially relevant and applied knowledge is viewed as more important to a 'knowledge economy'. Good (2001) comments that political and economic interest has taken precedence over knowledge, which I take to mean academic knowledge, and that this has led to a challenge from those with other knowledges, resulting in:

'increasing numbers of well-paid administrators, computer experts, equity officers and "support services" that claim equality with what they are supposedly supporting' (p.106).

Malcolm and Zukas (2000) believe this has led to 'the dislocation of pedagogical thought and practice' (p.53). This in turn is seen to have an impact on academic identity and autonomy which are generally portrayed as under attack. Henkel (2005) sees traditional boundaries as being tested, resulting in a 'site of struggle between academics and other interest groups from control of matters previously taken for granted as academic prerogative' (p.163-4).

Academics writing from this perspective comment on the change from the 'department' to the 'management' as the controlling unit of the university. They see the subsequent

growth of business and audit cultures as having led to outcomes-based learning, monitoring and review of teaching and learning. They also argue that learning has become commodified because of the focus in higher education on the enhancement of the skills base of the workforce. The impact of business ‘gurus’ and practices is seen as partly to blame and is viewed as resulting in teaching being given ‘high priority status as a client-orientated service’ (Hatcher *et al*, 1999, p.63), with any attempt to question the changes being limited by reference to quality assurance requirements. Trow (1993) is not alone in seeing the assessment of the quality of learning and teaching as a key mechanism of managerialism.

In order to explore the nature of professional services staff identity, it is also necessary to consider what has been written about academic staff identity, how the relationship between the two is perceived and how the nature of higher education institutions and their predominant discourses affect the formation of professional services’ staff identity.

3.2.1 Academic staff perceptions of role and identity

Research and writing relating to identity and roles of staff in higher education has tended, with some recent exceptions discussed below, to present a polarised, oppositional view of academic and professional services staff groupings. Brew (2006) notes the lack of an inclusive learning and teaching community, adding that: ‘We have separate communities of academics and of students and of general or support staff’ (p. 14).

Much of this work has, understandably, dealt with identity and role in relation to academic rather professional services staff, since the latter are less likely to carry out research. The major part of this writing presents concerns relating to exclusion, marginalisation, shifting power and the loss of autonomy. Where professional staff roles and identities are considered in relation to learning and teaching, they are usually viewed in contrast, often negatively expressed, with those of academic staff. Tensions arise when social norms are not shared and these are often related to ‘the power to define who is included and who is excluded’ (Woodward, 1997, p.15). Trow (2010) is

unusual in describing such tensions between the two groups as inevitable and healthy. As Crow and Maclean (2006) point out, beliefs and feelings are also involved, which I consider helps to explain why such tensions are often strongly experienced. They also note that communities change because membership alters and I would add that perceived external threats also impact on communities.

The cultural differences between academic and professional services staff also form a recurrent theme, with the issue of conflicting values predominating. In some cases, the identities and roles of staff in relation to learning and teaching are presented as irreconcilably different. Deem and Johnson (2000), for example, express the view that ‘Academics do different kinds of work from support staff and also have quite distinctive professional and other identities.’ (p. 65). They see UK universities as ‘permeated by managerial discourses and technologies’, a view of the cultural divide also expressed by Kogan (2000) who states that academic staff share ‘values, expertise and standards rather than the obligations of shared tasks’ (p.32) and share a culture of critical discourse, in contrast with administrative staff who promote ‘systemic values and pursuits’ (p.33). Similarly, Hellowell and Hancock (2001) comment that: ‘it is widely accepted’ (p. 185) that newer universities have more hierarchical management systems than older ones and that this has led to a corresponding reduction in collegiality which was: ‘never meant to apply to administrative staff’ (p.185). They also quote a head of department who felt it was not possible:

‘to direct staff to be creative or to be good teachers. Those qualities could only emerge from within a professional environment of the traditional collegial kind’ (p.190).

This viewpoint has implications of potential conflict for learning and teaching support staff who have a role in encouraging the development of good teaching.

However, even in terms of their role in supporting learning and teaching, professional services staff tend to be represented as either threatening or weakening the discipline-based values and authority of academic staff, and thus their identity, by promoting corporate values (Hatcher *et al*, 1999; Barnett, 2003; Winter 2009). Greenbank (2007), writing about widening participation, comments that barriers are encountered ‘because

departments and service areas have different values and objectives.’ (p. 216). Brennan and Shah (2000) see as a threat the development of institution-wide policies and curriculum frameworks, and increased accountability which ‘reduce the freedoms of individual academic staff members’ (p. 92). However, they also comment more positively that disciplinary values and norms still prevail and that the increased focus on teaching is welcomed by many academics.

The work that professional service staff carry out in connection with quality assurance is also seen as distorting teaching, a view exemplified by Malcolm and Zukas (2000) who state that:

‘the language of outcomes, objectives, assessment and reflection, rather than emerging from the practice of teaching, comes from outside it, shapes it to its own likeness and produces particular forms of educational practice’ (p.53).

Taylor (1999) makes a similar point about quality monitoring seeing it as expressing ‘a corporate culture that is oppositional to the collegial, academic culture.’ (p.92), while Rowland (2002) comments that it has become associated with a ‘culture of compliance’ (p.58). Professional services staff are perceived to be bureaucratic and to seek to apply a “checklist” approach to the evaluation of teaching, again partly in response to external pressure in relation to the requirements of quality assurance monitoring. Hockings (2005) sees this as ‘limiting innovation in teaching and improving student learning’ (p.322).

At the same time, the spread of institution-wide curricular steer and innovation, and the setting up of new units which carry out work previously in the domain of academic departments are also seen as a sign that administrators’ and ‘managerial’ values are overwhelming those of the academic community. Gornall (2009), writing from a professional services standpoint, notes that in many universities non-academic staff now outnumber academics and that the increased valuing of the former group has ‘led to the further demotion of academic employees as principal stars in the employment pantheon’ (p.127). Taylor (1999) presents this change as a loss of opportunity, as well as control, for academics as the focus on learning, rather than teaching, has facilitated role development, decision-making powers and increased contact with students for

professional services staff. Churchman and King (2009) echo this view of loss, but also consider that academics seek to preserve their identity by restricting interactions to those who share it.

Changes in approaches to learning and teaching, and some of the reasons underlying these changes, are considered to impact on academic identity, with Henkel (2005) noting that it is increasingly connected with the 'management' of student learning. Hatcher *et al* (1999) consider that new discourses relating to, for example, entrepreneurship and 'excellence', are not being challenged and are thus being allowed to change academic identity. Strike (2005) sees the introduction of tuition fees as another factor which has affected universities' missions and thus staff identities, leading to difficult career paths for academic staff, noting that while they are being encouraged to take on teaching roles, with more diverse learners, academics are not rewarded well for this work.

A view also emerges relating to wider issues of power in relation to learning and teaching, again generally noting as a threat the shifting of control from academic to administrative staff. Hellowell and Hancock (2001) note that administrative staff were traditionally excluded from the 'collegial' model and thus the academic decision-making process. This view reveals another reason for the negative perception of professional services staff, which is that they are also associated with what Deem (1998) has called 'new managerialism', which is seen to reduce academic staff's autonomy by allowing decisions to be made by non-academic managers and thus replacing: 'the collegiality of academics of equal status working together with minimal hierarchy and maximum trust' (p.48).

Deem and Johnson (2000) note the tensions involved in balancing 'institutional coherence with the needs to sustain levels of academic autonomy and freedom of action.' (p.69) but exemplify a frequently expressed concern that the balance is tilting against the latter. Gornall (1999) makes the point that so-called 'new professionals' can be regarded as '*marginal*' but *powerful*' (p.48, author's italics) because they are associated with changes desired by executive staff, a view supported by Evans (2008). Gornall also proposes that: '... in the 1990s, academics arguably lost control of the teaching and learning agenda' (p.127), implying that professional services staff

benefitted because they were better adapted to take advantage of the changes taking place in the sector.

The general view that emerges, then, is one of division and boundaries from the perspective of academic staff, who see the changing role of professional services staff as threatening their authority and disciplinary knowledge. These perceived threats to academic identity affect the way in which professional services staff are viewed.

In terms of the roles of professional services staff in supporting innovation and development in learning and teaching, these tend to be either unacknowledged or belittled because they are not discipline-related. Taylor (1999), for example, sees academic innovation emerging from the 'lone ranging' tendency of academic staff, rather than from a desire to contribute to institutional development, and sees the work of professional services staff in this area as leading to the emergence of an 'academic underclass' (p.88). Similarly, there is an argument, exemplified by Evans (2002), that innovative approaches to learning and teaching have been promoted by 'technical' staff who do not have the necessary pedagogical underpinning to their work but who have been allowed by 'management' to be involved in supporting learning, partly because this helps to implement external policies relating to the development of students' skills. The skills agenda itself provides a good examples of how tension between academic and professional services staff is created, with Evans (2002) criticising 'the poverty of the conception' (p. 41) of an agenda which professional services staff are often required by their institutions to support.

3.3 Views of profession and professionalism

Writing on profession and professionalism indicates that these are complex concepts and reveals a wide range of views on how they are defined. The concepts are seen as contested (Fox, 1992; Freidson, 1994; Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996; Hanlon, 1998) and as socially constructed. Holroyd (2000), for example, comments that: 'professionalism is not some social-scientific absolute, but a historically changing and socially constructed concept-in-use' (p.39).

Definitions of profession are subject to continuous revision, as are views as to which occupations can be categorised as professions. However, definitions tend to include a relatively constant set of ideas. These relate to knowledge, qualifications, training and development, intra- and inter-professional relationships, and relationships with the public and 'clients'. The provision of an altruistic service is also included in some definitions (Johnson, 1972), although Hanlon (1998) argues that the service ethos is being replaced by 'a new commercialised version of professionalism' (p.49). Becker (1970) sees the terms as social constructs consisting of several dimensions. He comments on professional knowledge which he states is often viewed as an 'esoteric and difficult body of knowledge which ... consists of abstract principles arrived at by scientific research and analysis, not just practical skills' (p.93?). While this may apply to traditional professions, it would be difficult to argue that this is the case for staff working in professional services. However, the idea of specialist knowledge has remained as a defining aspect of professionalism for support staff (Corrall and Lester, 1996), although controlled entry through a requirement for specialist professional qualifications does not appear to have survived, except for librarians. Becker notes that not all members of a profession are 'equally competent to supply the *core service*' (p.99, author's italics) partly because of the wider variation in work within professions. This highlights the importance of professional services staff defining what their core services are and institutions determining what the requirements are for staff undertaking roles which plan and deliver these services.

Besley *et al* (2006) consider that professionalism includes the:

'idea of a subject directed power based upon the liberal conception of rights, freedom and autonomy. It conveys the idea of a power given to the subject, and of the subject's ability to make decisions in the workplace' (p. 818).

The concept of autonomy which Becker, and Holroyd (2000), also see as a defining characteristic of profession would not apply to most professional services staff working in universities, although Becker does acknowledge that people working in bureaucratic organisations are subject to rules. However, there is also a view, exemplified by Farago

(1981), that higher education administration cannot be viewed as a profession partly because it is externally regulated as opposed to being self-regulating. Conway (2000) questions whether the diversity of administrative work means it cannot be called a profession and considers that any definitions of profession and professionalism developed by traditional professions certainly would not apply. Bacon (2009) takes the view that there is a significant difference between 'generic HE professionals' (p.10) and specialists from professions which exist outside higher education and argues that the two groups have different professional identities. With regard to the support of learning and teaching, he categorises staff working in library and information, IT and staff development related to teaching as professionals and the remainder as 'higher education managers and administrators' (p.11). Bacon sees professional identity as consisting of 'essential' and 'situational' layers, the latter consisting of 'the location of professional commitment within the institutional structure' (p.12). He argues that specialist professional services staff have access to a professional identity which is external to higher education but that generalist administrators and managers do not. This leads him to see essential identity as lying with specialism and to state that this essentialism reduces according to the length of time spent working in higher education.

Professionalism is also viewed as a 'discourse to promote occupational change' (Cheng, 2009). Hoyle (1975), for example, describes professionalism as the 'strategies and rhetorics employed by members of an occupation in seeking to improve status, salary and conditions' (p.315). Several writers, such as Evetts (2003), comment on the attractiveness of the concepts of profession and professionalism to organisations and staff working in them, and the increasing use of these terms. However, the difference between attempts made by institutional management to promote profession for either motivational, institutional change or performance improvement purposes is also highlighted, with some consensus on the view that the impact on identity is likely to be stronger where professionalism has arisen from those working in a particular occupation rather than from their senior management. The perceived advantages to staff relate to finance, status and power, although these benefits may not, in fact, be realised.

The production and reproduction of professionalism is also recognised as having an impact on identity. Evetts (2003) comments on: 'professional socialization by means of shared and common educational backgrounds, professional training and occupational experiences, and by membership of professional associations' (p.410). She sees this as a significant factor in the appeal of professionalism since, unrealistically in her view, it includes a collegial and supportive image rather than a competitive, managerial one. Evetts, Fournier (1998) and Hanlon (1998) view professionalism as relating to changing economic requirements which demand re-defined, wider roles, 'professional performance' and a more commercialised and entrepreneurial skills set, but which staff seize on as way of improving status and rewards. Whitchurch (2007) also comments on the 'process of professionalisation' (p.56) for administrators and managers through a dedicated qualification, a journal, a Code of Professional Standards and the development of a policy related body of knowledge. She views this approach to professional identity as 'essentialist' and not well suited to the diversity of professional managers whose identities she sees as being 'increasingly built across multiple zones of activity' (p.56).

A view also emerges relating to aspects of shared identity between senior managers. Deem and Johnson (2002) comment that very senior level manager-academics may have more in common with senior professional administrators than they do with other academics. Similarly, Bacon (2009) notes that senior academic and professional managers share many views and have 'a clear commonality of purpose and community' (p.12).

Attempts have also been made to define the types of professionals found in higher education. For example, the Association of University Administrators (AUA) defines three types of role: specialist professional, generalist professional and academic manager, while Corral and Lester (1996) distinguish between 'context' and 'conduit' professionals (p.88), where the former have specialist knowledge for delivery. However, Evans (2008) makes the crucial point that diversity among professional services undermines attempts to have a 'collective commonality of approach to and execution of the key roles, responsibilities and activities' (p.28). Whitchurch (2008) also comments that work has been done on defining the 'managerial professional'.

Other viewpoints focus on ethical codes and shared values, particularly altruistic service, as a feature of profession. Becker (1970) comments that the term profession implies 'morally desirable' work and that the term may thus be seen as: 'honorific, a term of approbation' (p.92) which is shared between professionals and would-be professionals. He sees this as relating to the fact that professionals hold an 'esteemed position' in society (p.96), making professional status desirable because it is prestigious. This is of interest with regard to the use of the term 'professional services' in higher education, where its introduction may have been intended to raise status, among other reasons. Altruism is noted as one of the values underlying professionalism (Crompton, 1990; Evetts 2003). Crompton observes that the concept of altruistic service is not limited to the 'caring' professions but is often found in services where women have a service role and where it has been 'systematically inculcated' (p.157). Evans (2008) considers that: 'professional culture makes up a large proportion of what, in many cases, is considered to be professionalism' (p.24) but also adds that defining professionalism is often used an attempt to define what work should be carried out.

Professionalism is also seen as being related to quality of practice (Sockett 1996). Evans (2008) considers that this may lead to a view of professionalism as a representation of 'a service level requirement' (p.27), that is, a professionalism that is imposed from above rather than being embedded in practice. However, a study by Boyt *et al* (2001) indicates that reward for professionalism does help to contribute to improving professional practice. However, they also note that there is another viewpoint which sees professionalism as being concerned more with attitudes and behaviours, although views vary as to how far these are externally imposed and how far internally constructed. Wilson and Halpin (2006) state that their research into library staff professional identity revealed that service requirements threatened professional identity in terms of professional standing, but also noted that staff were pleased to be able to acquire new and transferable skills. Professional association literature, such as the AUA's, also emphasises the importance of standards, values and behaviours, and highlights the need for reflective practice as part of professional development. Berman and Pitman (2010)

note a similar emphasis from research administrators' professional bodies who focus on: 'established codes of professional standards, professional development and accreditation, academic journals, and a body of knowledge and skills that underpin the profession' (p.159). This exemplifies Day's (1999) view of professionalism as being norms-focussed. In contrast, Holmes (2010) comments on the importance of flexibility for professional staff noting that:

'the professional administrator is becoming more and more chameleon-like – changing his or her spots to fit into and make a contribution to changing management teams and structures' (p.112).

The growth of professionalization is viewed by writers such as Holmes as resulting in part from the expansion of universities from the 1960s onwards and the opportunities this brought for more differentiation and specialisation in administrative functions, and equally for increasing professionalism which Holmes sees as being exemplified by 'trained career administrators and emergence of professional standards' (p.112). For some commentators, this is once again seen as a potential threat to academic staff, as remarked on by Rhoades (1996) who sees: 'a substantial challenge to the professional position of the established academic profession and the professionalization of a range of new support and administrative occupations in the academy whose work is increasingly central to institutions of higher education' (p.655).

There is also some discussion of the concept of 'new professionalism', a term coined by Dearing in relation to professional services (Gornall, 1999; Conway, 2000; Evans, 2008). Gornall sees 'new professionals' as being an 'emergent group clustered around changing forms of support for learning and teaching' (p.45). She uses the term on the basis of such postholders' specialist or discipline-based background, and because they use their professional skills 'in a new strategic and practical context' (p.45) and often work in newly-structured units within a range of post titles. She also notes that their posts are often funded through incentives designed to change learning and teaching. However, as many of these funding sources have now dried up, such posts are less likely to be externally funded and may have vanished or changed, which may or may not have had an impact on 'new professionalism'. As she also notes, such staff do not use the term to

describe themselves, nor see themselves as a professional grouping, and so the term's impact on identity is doubtful. Conway comments that while new professionals may have contributed to the blurring of boundaries between academic and professional staff, blurring and convergence of work represent a threat to professional services staff since this suggests that administrative work is not valued and does not need to be carried out by professionals, which may lead to the outsourcing of generalist administration in the future: 'if administrators as a group cannot define and promote their roles and the value of their work' (p.15). Like Gornall, she considers there is a perception that 'new professionals' are more closely linked to teaching and learning than administrative staff.

3.3.1 The impact of research associations and professional bodies

Berman and Pitman (2009) note that US professional associations for research management have established 'codes of professional standards, professional development and accreditation, academic journals, and a body of knowledge and skills that underpin the profession' (p. 158). While there is significantly less development in the UK, a number of bodies in the UK provide a perspective on role and identity for professional services staff through their publications and staff development offerings. The Association of University Administrators (AUA) provides the most extensive guidance for its members, including a 'Values' statement (undated) which sets out four values, underpinned by a list of nine 'behaviours' it aims to develop. Their CPD Framework (undated) emphasises their aim of supporting staff in their career development, and, in line with their 'values', includes the promotion of equality of development and opportunity for its members and aims to help them to demonstrate: 'the professionalism that staff bring to the support of the student experience'. The AUA's postgraduate certificate focusses on the development of participants as 'reflective practitioners'. While their aims may be seen as somewhat generalised and simplistic, the AUA's membership is very wide and includes staff with a range of support posts and salary grades. However, I would argue that the expressed aims do not help to develop a strong or challenging professional identity for support staff.

3.3.2 Professional staff identities

In comparison with the extensive writing about academic identity, there has been little about professional and administrative staff, a point noted by Hall and Hall (2011) and Pick *et al* (2012) in their study of three Australian universities. This is interesting when taken alongside the growth in numbers of professional services staff in higher education in the UK; Lauwerys (2009) quotes HESA data of 40,000 professional services staff at the date of his research. This growth is also reflected in higher education in the USA (Rhoades, 1996) and in Australia.

This comparative silence has meant that there has been little focus on the change in the role of professional services staff. Barnett (1993) comments on the traditional role of administrators in the Humboldtian university, which he describes as being to maintain communications among academic community and to defend the university against the state: ‘The role of the administrator was no less than to uphold the ideal idea of the university’ (p.183). This role included the support of ‘knowledge’, which in this context means academic and disciplinary-based knowledge. Whitchurch (2006) comments on the continuing impact on the identity of professional managers of the:

‘roles played by a relatively homogeneous cadre of administrative staff in the pre-1992 sector, whose prime purpose was to support collegial decision-making by academic colleagues, from whom they were clearly differentiated’ (p.9).

Barnett (1993) acknowledges that academic administration is now a ‘fuzzy’ concept but views the role of the administrator as being a ‘servant to the academic community’ (p.184), which he compares to being a civil servant. In his view, administrative staff should seek to communicate the key values and discourses of the academic community and should be accountable to that community. This view will not cover the roles of all professional services staff since they are not all carrying out ‘administrative’ work, nor does it allow for other drivers which may steer their work. As Lauwerys (2009) points out, ‘generalists represent a much smaller proportion of those working in the Professional Services in HE than used to be the case’ (p.18). This is also noted by Rhoades (1996) who comments on:

‘the professionalization of a range of new support and administrative occupations in the academy whose work is increasingly central to institutions of higher education’ (p.655).

However, the term ‘administration’, as Whitchurch (2007) has noted, is often used as a synonym for clerical work, despite an Association of University Teachers (AUT) report (2001) highlighting the work of administrative staff in carrying out a range of activities related to student learning.

Developments in learning and teaching have impacted on professional services as well as academic staff. Scott (2005) comments that the recent emphasis on ‘learning’ rather than ‘teaching’ has resulted in the problematisation of the definition of teacher in part because of the: ‘extension of the “teaching” community to embrace a wider range of professional staff’ (p. 62). Professional staff who support learning and teaching have a range of roles, some of which are better understood and recognised than others. Browne and Beetham (2010) have noted the lack of literature about these roles and positions in relation to learning and teaching. Cour (2001) notes the proliferation of post titles and quotes a head of a learning and teaching unit on the ‘difficulties in defining our work and our role institutionally’ (p.17). Cour’s survey of activities carried out by professional services staff indicated that the range overlapped in a number of areas with those carried out by academic staff, including a role in the co-delivery as well as the support of learning and teaching. Cour also comments that the erosion of distinction between academic and professional services staff will become increasingly irrelevant as more work is shared. Browne and Beetham (2010) writing on the role of educational technologists in supporting learning and teaching also note the increased range of role, noting that: ‘Educational technology roles remain complex, hybrid and subject to change’ (p.24).

Wilson and Halpin (2006) have written about the impact of changes in information communication technology and electronic information services on library staff, commenting that this has led to a ‘a new professional philosophy within the sector’ (p.79) which has brought the professional identity of academic librarianship into question, which they also comment had received attention in literature before that date.

Roles relating to quality assurance tend to affect larger numbers of academic staff and also tend to be those which are most criticised by academic staff for running contrary to academic values. However, Browne and Beetham (2010) note that:

‘educational technologists also have to deal with reluctance on the part of many staff to change practices that are associated with their academic history and values’ (p.29).

Professional services staff roles also include the development of students’ skills, another agenda which is seen as contrary to disciplinary-related values. Barnett (1992) argues that there is an implication that the academic development of undergraduate students cannot be left to academic staff. Corral and Lester (1996) present a slightly different view of this, arguing that skills development has become divorced from disciplines because of academic staff’s unwillingness or inability to teach them, leading to a reliance on professional services staff to do this.

The representation of professional service staff is also a theme. Lauwerys (2009) notes that that one finding from his research was that when recruiting, HE institutions made:

‘a poor job of explaining the nature of the institution from the Professional Services perspective or what the job for which they were applying was really about’ (p.16).

This suggests that professional services staff may have embraced the changes in higher education more readily than institutions as a whole and that there may be a lack of institutional understanding of these roles. Brew (2006) also comments on the difference in the way professional services staff are recruited and managed, compared with academic staff.

The status of learning and teaching is also mentioned. Osborne (2002) comments that learning and teaching tends to be less valued than research in universities, which provides a reason for poor self-esteem among professional services staff who support learning and teaching. Scott (1995) supports this view, suggesting that academics must be “bribed” to teach by being allowed time to undertake research. Becher and Trowler (2001) state that their study led them to the conclusion that for academic staff:

‘membership ... is defined in terms of excellence in scholarship and originality in research, and not in any significant degree in terms of teaching capability’ (p.28), noting also that tutorials and teaching are seen as ‘low status, unrewarded work’ (p.55), which is often carried out by female academics. The Boyer Commission report (1998) notes the same lower status of learning and teaching in US universities, where undergraduate teaching is often devolved to ‘the scholars’ apprentice, the graduate student’ (p.16).

McInnis (1998), writing on Australian universities, comments that it is important to administrative staff that their work is valued by academic staff, which I think is also the case in UK higher education. He notes their dissatisfaction with the use of the default term ‘non-academic’ to describe administrative staff and with the lack of respect which they perceived was given to their specialist skills, and their frustration when their ‘increasingly pivotal role’ in supporting learning and teaching (p.168) was unrecognised. Lauwerys (2009), reporting on interviews he conducted with professional services staff, notes that one member commented that he ‘found the low esteem given to those working in the professional areas, particularly by academics, depressing’ (p.22), exacerbated by the fact that professional services staff are viewed as an ‘overhead’ by some academic staff. Pick *et al* (2010) found in their study of technical, administrative and clerical support staff that over fifty percent of respondents considered lack of recognition for their work to be a stressor. They also suggest that this category of staff in new universities experience additional stress. Browne and Beetham (2010) also comment on lack of recognition, but add that the ‘sense of self esteem and career enhancement is greatly influenced by senior management motivations and academics’ willingness to engage as equal partners’ (p.9). An additional factor is commented on by Corrall and Lester (1996) in relation to the ‘uneasy’ relationship between academic and administrative staff: ‘which veers from critical dependence to indifference or resentment’ (p.84). They note the pay and status differences between academic staff and professional services staff with academic and specialist qualifications. However, there is also a recognition that boundaries are becoming less strictly delineated and that this has had an impact on professional services staff identities.

The ways in which professional services staff work has also been seen as impacting on identity. Bacon (2009) notes that the physical location of professional services staff, even if they support particular academic departments, encourages an institutional, as opposed to a departmental, situational identity, which marks a clear difference between professional services and academic staff. Seyd (2000) comments that the requirement for administrators to work in clearly defined hours and in the workplace also contrasts with the needs of academic staff to work outside the structure of set hours and physical university space. She also comments on administrators' expectation of being line managed. However, she sees shared values, including a commitment to professionalism, as providing a level of commonality between academic and professional services staff.

3.4 Changing boundaries and 'third space'

Becher and Trowler (2001) describe boundaries as 'territorial possessions that can be encroached upon, colonized and reallocated' (p.59). Boundaries are not immutable and changes may reflect the wider developments occurring in different social contexts.

A positive picture is also painted when the possibilities for increased collaboration as a result of the changes in cultures and communities higher education are considered.

Rhoades and Sporn (2002) writing on higher education in the USA and in Europe note that: 'most academics perform some administrative tasks, and many non-faculty employees perform some academic tasks: a clean separation between them is somewhat artificial' (p.5).

Corrall and Lester (1996), commenting on the development of the 'para-academic' role express a similar view, considering that there is a 'blurring of boundaries and convergence of interest and activities between 'professional' and 'professors' (p. 85), and also between different groups of professional services staff. Wilson and Halpin (2006) also see an increase in cross-boundary working and the development of a hybrid library environment which have affected role and professional identity. They see an

erosion of the former distinction between professional and paraprofessional staff which being ‘chartered’ used to maintain, but which staff with business administration or teaching information skills are now able to achieve as such new skills have increased in importance. They also note institutions’ requirement for staff to have ‘transferable’ and entrepreneurial skills, and the use of more generalised job descriptions which erode the need for specialised knowledge. Rhoades (2005) further argues that the increased involvement of professional services staff in academic work requires a more inclusive and democratic higher education community, a point also made by Brew (2006) and by Whitchurch (2008), who considers that professional services staff are increasingly well-placed to contribute to a reinterpretation of collegiality.

While the roles of administrative and academic staff used to be clearly differentiated, they are no longer so easily distinguished. Barnett (2003), commenting on the “fuzzy” boundaries, is not alone in seeing the potential for identity and role that change brings: ‘Amid fluid modernity, the self becomes a pool of ontological possibilities and identity takes on new meaning, even as it becomes problematic’ (p.12). As boundaries weaken and blur, opportunities emerge for role development and new relationships between staff groupings.

The concept of changing boundaries has been extensively discussed by Whitchurch (2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2012), who has explored the blurring of role boundaries and its impact on the professional identity of administrative and managerial staff in higher education in some depth. Like Barnett, Whitchurch sees a link between complexity, in relation to roles, and the ‘fuzziness’ of boundaries. She notes the dynamic nature of staff roles, which is not necessarily captured by organisational structures, and the development of blended, or ‘hybrid’ roles and the emergence of what she terms the ‘blended professional’ in reference to staff whose identities are drawn from academic and administrative domains. Wild and Wooldridge (2009) support the view of hybrid roles, noting that ‘employment opportunities now often lead to the accumulation of a mixed portfolio rather than following a linear “career” progression’ (p.5), and that the divide between academic and administrative staff is weakening because of increased collaborative working.

For such professional staff, Whitchurch argues, ‘multi-professional identities can arise’ (2007, p.53), particularly for those who have academic qualifications, carry out work which used to be carried out by academic staff and carry out ‘quasi-academic functions’ (p.54) which may involve skills in teaching or research. She also views administrative managers as being ‘subject to competing identities’ (2004, p.283) as they struggle to determine whether they should provide a service or contribute to policy making, work at the centre of the institution or ‘go native’ at departmental level.

Whitchurch sees the changes in higher education as offering potential for both collaboration and competition between groups of staff as functions, and thus identities, increasingly overlap. She also sees the emergence of partnership working, as opposed to a service oriented role, for professional staff as leading to the development of a ‘third space’, as discussed above (3.1.4), and the emergence of ‘quasi-academic’ roles where the work of academic and administrative staff overlaps and converges as providing opportunities as well as challenges. In this third space where academic and professional domains meet, traditional role boundaries no longer apply and activities, such as project work, are carried out by both academic and administrative staff. The application of the concept of third space in this context was devised by Whitchurch as a response to the ‘binary divisions’ (2010, p.2) present in much of the writing about staff in higher education, as described above, which presents polarised positions on academic and other staff, on generalists and specialists, and on managers and administrators. She sees third space as ‘a new space in its own right’ (2010, p.6) and not simply a space where activities that do not fit neatly into academic or non-academic categories take place.

Her research findings relating to the roles of senior and middle level administrators (2008) led her to conclude that, based on her categorisation of these roles, in three out of four staff groupings roles could be viewed as dynamic, with individuals working across traditional boundaries. She also concluded that the identity of one grouping could be characterised as that of the ‘blended professional’, where partnership working in third space was increasingly common. The research she carried out to explore third space working in two case institutions (2010) also highlighted the sense of ‘in-between-ness’

(p.8) of roles and identities among the respondents. This research included a focus on project working in relation to Learning and Programme Support.

The possibility for third space working is partly attributed by Whitchurch to government policies relating to skills development, economic growth and the increased diversity of the student population which have led to increasing role complexity for both academic and professional services staff, with areas such as widening participation and skills support being offered as examples of where third space working is emerging. She sees the convergence of activities carried out by both groups of staff as being evidenced in both structure and practice in universities, leading to the possibility of 'transformative' organisations where social culture is managed more actively and social networks thus become increasingly important.

Whitchurch's work relates to administrators with a managerial role and her later research also considers third space work for staff in administrative roles. It is quite broad-based in terms of the administrative areas it covers and is not limited to learning and teaching-related roles. Her work has been further developed in relation to the changing identities and roles of staff working in research management and administration (Allen-Collinson, 2007; Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2009; Berman and Pitman, 2010; Shelley, 2010). Their research findings also lead them to identify the blurring of boundaries, seeing the area where academic and administrative fields cross as one of tension where the two groups compete for research cultural capital. Like Whitchurch, Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2009) see this as leading to the emergence of hybrid or 'multi-professional' identities (p. 143). Using Bourdieu's concepts, they also argue that research administrators have developed a particular form of *capital* that enables them to perform well in both academic and administrative roles. This includes the ability to deal with unplanned work and to prioritise competing demands. However, it could equally be argued that this is a requirement of all modern administrative work. More interestingly, they comment on research administrators' presentation of self, for example, 'a professional, business-like and reasonable self' (p.154) in order to gain compliance from academic staff. This idea of the deliberate assumption of an identity for a particular purpose indicates not only multiple identities of professional services

staff, but also awareness of and the ability to use this hybridity to advantage. Shelley's research (2010) also explores the changing role of research managers and administrators through the perspective of Bourdieu's theory of social practice, Shelley concluding that the wide range of roles of the staff she surveyed reflected the variety of tasks they undertook and that the evolving and dynamic nature of these roles, together with shifting boundaries between academic and administrative staff, also created issues relating to identity and recognition. Her findings, like Whitchurch's, also suggest that third space, or space where roles overlap, is 'a space of tension and struggle' (p. 59) in respect of where the power lies.

While third space working is seen to be developing in relation to staff who support research, there is less evidence in relation to learning and teaching support. This may be due in part to the higher status of research in higher education institutions, as mentioned previously, but other factors such as range of roles and preparedness for new ways of working may also be factors. While it is not a key focus of her work, Brew (2006) considers that a more inclusive community would be helpful in promoting research-based teaching, also noting the emergence of hybrid roles in the support of learning. Brew sees the organisational structure of universities as inimical to collaborative working and argues for the need for to remove traditional divisions, 'which define academics and administrative/ technical "support" or "general" staff as occupying separate facilities, with different rules and levels of commitment to the institution, on the one hand, and privileged "academic" status on the other' (p.143).

Like Bhahba (1994), who comments that third space makes things possible and makes trouble at the same time, Whitchurch does not present third space working as problem-free, noting that there is resistance to the erosion of traditional boundaries and that contested space leads to power struggles and political manoeuvring. She quotes a research respondent who recognised that the very idea of 'academic activities within an administrative set up is very uncomfortable for a lot of people' (2008, p. 409).

Whitchurch (2009) also notes the issues related to the changing nature of professional services and their work in terms of perceived power shifts, including those which occur: 'when individuals entered contested space and played a part in the power struggles and

battles that go on' (p. 408) and those resulting from the perception that academic and managerial work are becoming increasingly separated.

Research findings into identity and role overlap support those of Whitchurch in relation to the tensions and power conflicts that emerge where work is shared. While Winter (2009) takes a positive view that new practices create spaces in which power can be successfully challenged and negotiated, others, such as Browne and Beetham (2010), note that as professional services staff are 'closely identified with a number of contested agendas: technology; professionalisation of teaching; the learner experience; opening up to new markets' (p.28), they are likely to experience a considerable amount of tension as traditional discourses and practices are challenged. Writing on administrators' role satisfaction in Australian universities, McInnis (1998) comments on the 'uneasy and ambivalent relationships' (p.161) caused by the expansion of administrative staff numbers and in the work carried out by academic staff, and the need to manage the interface between the two groups effectively, taking the view that there has been a lack of research into the area of staff roles and values, particularly in the case of administrative staff. Like Whitchurch, McInnis sees the transformative possibilities of role changes and dissolving boundaries for universities, which he considers to be of key importance in relation to the increasing marketisation of higher education.

Whitchurch's views have been challenged, for example by Winter (2009), who considers that the hybrid and dynamic identities Whitchurch has noted among certain groups of staff will not be adopted by 'the heartland' of discipline-based staff. However, since the majority of journal articles on the subject of academic identity, Winter's included, indicate that the 'heartland' is itself undergoing change, this may not prove to be the case in the longer term.

Additionally, the 'boundaryless' career', as noted by Arthur (1994), may not have entirely benign consequences and can result in uncertainty for staff. The concept, as Fournier (1998) notes, may be presented as an opportunity for individuals 'to cultivate their self, to realize their dreams, and at the same time to contribute to, and share in, the enchantment of organizational excellence'(p.56), but the reality can prove to be very different. Fournier considers that those staff who do not absorb the entrepreneurial

identity may become marginalised, although she also argues that marginalisation has an important impact on identity, allowing for resistance to entrepreneurial identity. Wilson and Halpin (2006) suggest that staff who fail to develop such skills face obsolescence.

In conclusion, the concept of changing boundaries in relation to professional services staff is presented as complex and contested, as is the case with identity itself. The changing landscape of higher education has resulted in a wide discussion about identity which, more recently, has included some consideration of professional services staff but which recognises that, because of the social nature of identity, this cannot be looked at in isolation from other staffing groups.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This chapter describes the design of the research, outlines the methods used to carry it out and explains how the data were analysed. It refers to the published writing which informed the methodology and discusses some of the issues which needed consideration at different stages of the research process.

4.1 Research approach and design

In designing the research, I considered that the nature of the research questions required me to explore in depth the factors that shaped professional services staff's perceptions of their roles and identity. I believed it would be necessary to enquire into their career journeys, their everyday experiences of their relationships with academic and other professional services staff, their values and professional behaviours, and the culture in which they worked. As all of these were complex and would require the exploration of contested concepts, the need for a qualitative methodology which would facilitate the collection of 'rich' data emerged as a priority. Writing on research design suggests that a conceptual framework rather than a theory often underpins qualitative research and guides the choice of methods accordingly. Interpretive approaches are seen as facilitating the production of 'thick' description (Flick, 1988) and holistic overviews which allow for the examination of how meaning is constructed in relation to social practices (Scott and Usher, 1996). Writing which provides commentary on the methods used for qualitative research supports the view that these approaches facilitate exploration of contested issues and provide the opportunity to focus on the particular.

A second reason for choosing a qualitative methodology was that the identity of professional services staff has not often been the subject of research, particularly in comparison with that of academic staff. I considered that the research should give a voice to staff who either cannot express their views or are not heard (Miller and Glassner, 2004). Postcolonial discourses of exclusion and inclusion, and 'Othering', discussed in Chapter Three, informed this aspect of the research enquiry, and strongly

suggested that the design needed to provide a framework for staff to reflect on and express their views and experiences in depth.

Research which is designed to obtain qualitative data has been extensively discussed in relation to enquiry into education. The contested nature of the concepts that are researched is widely given as a rationale for the choice of approach (May, 2006), with writers such as Clough and Nutbrown (2007) commenting on the fact that they have used different approaches, depending on what they wanted to research, while making more frequent use of a qualitative methodology. While some writers state that researchers should align themselves with one paradigm, there is a view (Silverman, 2001; Warren, 2002) that it may be useful to make use of some quantitative, in addition to qualitative, methods particularly for initial or exploratory work. Hesse-Biber (2010) notes that mixed methods are used for a variety of reasons, and that quantitative studies are used, for example, to generate qualitative research questions and also to enhance the generalizability of qualitative findings. Although I decided to make use of a survey which provided me with some quantitative data, it also included some open questions which produced qualitative data. The extent to which a mixed methodology was used is therefore limited.

However, I did not see the research as having an emancipatory aim and the design therefore needed to be situated in an interpretative rather than a critical paradigm. My understanding of interpretive research is that its key aim is to understand, rather than to measure, social and cultural phenomena, and that rather than aiming to obtain 'objective' data, it acknowledges the value of 'subjective' data, including the contribution of the researcher and the research subject to the creation of knowledge. The research design needed to facilitate understanding of the predominant discourses, but not necessarily to challenge them. For example, I wanted to explore what Foucault (1980) describes as 'power at the point where its intention ... is completely invested in its real and effective practices' (p.97), but to seek data that provided information about this, without having a transformative aim underpinning the exploration.

As a member of professional services myself, I was interested in focussing the research on the context in which my own work and that of my colleagues staff was based, and for

this reason decided that a case study based on the institution would provide the fullest possible basis. It would enable me to obtain data from a number of sources while focussing on a restricted context.

My own positionality was also a factor in the research design. While I use both quantitative and qualitative data in my daily work, I find qualitative data the more compelling of the two in terms of providing insights into views, perceptions and experiences. To a certain extent, my view has been confirmed by the literature I have read as part of the research, since the memorable studies for me have been the findings based on case study and interviews rather than on statistical data. I have tried to remain aware of my positionality at all stages of the research process and this was part of the reason why I decided to include in the design a short survey which would serve as a balance as well as providing useful quantitative data.

4.1.1 The case study

The consideration of the research questions through a case study was based on the decision to focus on a particular group of staff within a single institution. The approach was also influenced by the nature of the research topic which deals with contested concepts. Case study has been used extensively in research relating to education, and the advantages of its use for exploring complex and contested areas are highlighted in writing on research methodology, which emphasises the use of this research strategy where the aim is to explore particular and varied social phenomena, even though the study may be set in a wider context (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003).

I also considered that the nature of the research questions would be facilitated through a case study since I was aiming to explore and understand, rather than to measure, the topic. Stake comments that case study is fully in line with the aims of qualitative research since it facilitates: ‘understanding the complex interrelationships among all that exists’ (p. 64). Yin, who has written extensively about the use of case studies, and Thomas (2011) both comment on their value where the researcher is seeking to ask ‘how and why’ questions. Other advantages of case study noted in research methodology

writing include the amassing of a wide range of qualitative data, in particular what Geertz (1973) terms ‘thick description’, and the possibility of exploring propositions in depth within a limited context.

The limitations of case study are also mentioned in writing on qualitative approaches, a key one being that it does not allow for generalisation (Walker, 1980). However, Yin (2003) points out that case study should be ‘significant’ and capable of replication, and that the findings of case studies may be used, in the same way that experiments are, to lead to generalisation of theory. In the case of a single case study this would seem to be potentially dangerous, since individual social circumstances may vary considerably, and while the outcomes of a case study may be discussed in relation to an existing theory, theorising on the basis of a single study would not be convincing, in my opinion. Stake (1995) argues that case study may lead to the modification of a generalisation and that generalisations may be made within the case study itself, a view that maintains the focus on the particular, while allowing for broader or comparative perspectives to emerge.

The possibility of case study becoming too narrative is also seen as a potential danger (Yin 2003). However, this would seem to be avoidable provided that the research questions are kept in view at all stages of the research process. While Stake (1995) comments that ‘... we may get insight into the [*research*] question by studying a particular case’ (p.3), this does not mean that case study can be exempted from required rigour in terms of the research questions and the analysis of the data obtained.

4.1.2 Research methods

The methods selected were an examination of documents, a short survey and semi-structured interviews. Of these, the interviews were intended to provide the main part of the data to be examined.

A study of the documentation was included to provide contextualising information, including some sense of the history of developments which might affect the identity of professional services staff. I also expected it would provide me with a sense of

institutional aims and objectives in relation to professional services staff and also reflect how such staff were perceived. Finally, I hoped it would provide a degree of triangulation in relation to the interview data.

The survey was designed to provide the following sets of information. Firstly, it aimed to provide some quantitative data about the participants and their work, in part to contextualise the qualitative data which would form the main part of the data collected. A second aim was to collect data which would enable me to identify the roles of staff supporting learning and teaching, and to start to discover how posts and their requirements shape role and identity in the institution. Questions were therefore designed to capture data relating to post titles, qualifications, areas of learning and teaching related work carried out by participants, and the skills and person specifications required for posts. Thirdly, I wanted to find out which themes would be fruitful ones to explore in more depth in the interviews which would form the second stage of the data collection, with particular reference to staff perceptions about their role and identity. My expectation was that these would probably relate to actual work carried out as opposed to job descriptions and post titles, and to how staff perceived their work was valued, so questions related to these areas were included. I also wanted to see what the relationship was between the qualifications they were required to have and the work they were expected to do. Further questions were designed to obtain data relating to staff motivation for taking up their posts, their opportunities for initiating learning and teaching related work with those they liaised with and whether they felt their work was valued.

Questions were also included to collect data relating to length of time in post and previously held posts. I particularly wished to see if there was evidence of staff moving between academic and non-academic posts. For this reason, the survey was initially limited to professional services staff on similar pay grades to academic staff. In order to increase participation and in an attempt to obtain a different perspective, it was later extended to support staff in the Faculties.

When designing the research, I considered that the area I wanted to explore required me to provide the opportunity for participants to think and talk about the questions in some

depth. As I would be asking about perceptions and feelings, I thought interviews would provide time for participants to reflect on what they were being asked, and to ask for clarification if necessary. They would enable meaning to be fully explored by researcher and participants by providing a degree of flexibility, particularly if they were semi-structured, rather than consisting of specific questions to be explored. Similarly, I thought that interviews would help to explore areas that participants did not frequently reflect on. For example, Hoy's (1986) comments on Foucault's view that the exercise of power may often not be consciously known by those experiencing its effects suggested that interviewing could facilitate the uncovering of this knowledge.

Interviewing is widely discussed as providing the opportunity to explore social phenomena in depth, and to obtain data which allows for the participants' own discovery or improved understanding, as well as that of the researcher, for example by Miller and Glassner (2004). Interviews are seen as a valuable qualitative research method because of the opportunity they offer for what Warren (2002) describes as focusing on interpretations derived from respondents' talk, rather than on facts. Kvale (1996) sees the purposes of interviews as being 'to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena' (p.6). He advocates the use of the semi-structured, theme-oriented and descriptive interview which is nevertheless focussed and which allows for interpretation of meaning, and where an important role of the interviewer is to clarify. Silverman (2001) sees value in loosely structured interviews as a means of generating, rather than testing, hypotheses. These views fit well with the use of case study as an approach where the aim is to explore complex social concepts and to obtain a range of views.

Interviews are also seen as empowering by writers such as Rees (1991) and Clough (2002) since, in the words of Bogdan and Biklen (1982), they allow for 'the recognition of the views of the powerless and the excluded' (p.20), in other words those whose views are not normally heard or represented. Participants are also noted by Holstein and Gubrium (2004) to be 'comfortable' in general with interviews, which indicates that this is a useful method to use where participants who are not frequently consulted will be asked to reflect their views.

Interviewing is not seen as being wholly straightforward as a research method, however. Silverman (2001) warns of the danger of interviews becoming too narrative or anecdotal, which highlights the importance of the interviewer's role in maintaining a balance between allowing space for participants to explore a theme and keeping the research questions in focus.

A significant sub-set of the writing about interviewing as a research method deals with difficulties relating to the status of the interviewer and participants (Johnson, 2002; Miller and Glassner, 2004; Clough, 2002). Writing on 'insider' and 'outsider' status, Miller and Glassner note that interviewees may enjoy speaking to an 'expert' or alternatively may not wish to disclose to them, Miller drawing on his own research to exemplify the former, where perceived lack of shared understanding encouraged participants to disclose. Collins (1990) argues that interviewers have to have lived or experienced their material in some fashion to legitimize their knowledge. However, this view does not allow for the outsider perspective, which can sometimes cut quickly to the heart of an issue or experience. I would argue that it is more important that the researcher does not dismiss or deny the legitimacy of the interviewee's experience and values. Johnson and Johnson (2002) consider that novice interviewers are less likely to possess hardened assumptions, but I consider that, on the other hand, novices may well have assumptions which may be based on limited understanding or knowledge and which may also cause them to miss nuances.

Several writers such as Scheurich (1995), and Scott and Usher (1996) point out that interviews are not neutral or anonymous and that there is an imbalance of power between interviewer and participants. Scott and Usher add that that research 'is always and inevitably involved with and implicated in the operation of power' (p.76), which highlights the importance of reflexivity on the part of the researcher. This is also suggested by the views of Holstein and Gubrium (2004) in relation to interviews as a way of enabling participants to talk about their lives when they point out that interviewers cannot help but become involved in the creation of meaning together with their participants. I consider that accepting this view that participants and interviewers co-construct knowledge requires the acceptance of the need for interviewer reflexivity.

While several researchers comment positively on the level and depth of feeling that interviews can uncover (Douglas, 1985; Gronn, 2007), they less commonly consider the potential impact of this on the researcher, who is not a professional counsellor and who may not be well equipped to deal with such emotions.

The possibility of participants trying to give favourable accounts of themselves (Ribbens, 2007; Gronn, 2007) is also noted, and the use of triangulation of methods is frequently mentioned as a way of ensuring other data are considered. Comments on the possibility of the researcher's own views intruding, through trying to understand those of the participants, is also mentioned. However, this would seem to me to be one of the positive outcomes of enquiry, namely that the researcher is open to their preconceptions being changed.

Because of my 'insider-outsider' status, discussed below (4.1.3) I considered that individual interviews as opposed to focus groups would feel safer for participants, although I gave extensive thought to this, as I could appreciate that some people might prefer to express their views as part of a collegial group, rather than as individuals. My final decision was partly influenced by the fact that I wanted to ensure that all participants had an equal opportunity to give their views. I also believed that in a group setting, participants would be more likely to be influenced by the group dynamic, and perhaps more likely to feel the need to express what they perceived to be an institutional view.

4.1.3 Issues considered in relation to the research design

As I moved from one institution to another shortly after planning the research and starting to study more of the writing on research design, I had to determine whether the research questions and therefore the research design were still appropriate. For this reason I did not start to collect data immediately, but spent some time reading internal and external facing documentation about the institution and talking to colleagues to help me understand its cultures. Although the institution was very different in terms of mission and student body, there was sufficient similarity in terms of the overall structure

of faculties and 'central' services to reassure me about continuing as planned. I also considered that the field I had chosen could be researched in any single institution, although, as with any case study, the findings would vary.

As an 'insider researcher' I had considered the potential issues this status could raise in relation to conducting a qualitative enquiry both at an early stage and again when seeking ethical approval to carry out the research. However, changing institutions meant that I was both insider and outsider to the research participants, and in terms of my own knowledge of the institution in which I would now be carrying out the research. I considered it advantageous that I would approach the case study without the preconceptions that I would have had in my previous institution. Also, as a newcomer I could ask for documents and put questions as part of the interview process that people would not think I already knew, which I hoped would reduce potential anxiety about the questions, which focussed on areas of some sensitivity. Although it was not a requirement, I sought ethical approval from my new institution and stated what steps I would take to reduce risk to participants. In fact, the interview process revealed that the dual insider-outsider status was a cause of some uncertainty for the participant and further consideration of this issue is included in the section below on interviews held as part of the data collection (4.2.3).

As a single institution forms the basis of the case study, it was also necessary to consider the potential for the institution being recognised. This was another reason for seeking ethical approval from the institution and also the approval of my line manager to carry out the research. Since the institutional structure described and some of the post titles referred to had changed between the collection of the data and the completion of the thesis, I considered that this would reduce the risk of recognition. I later discussed the outcomes of the research with my line manager so that there would be an opportunity for any institutional concern to be raised. However, the institution would be identifiable to anyone who knew me, including institutional colleagues. For this reason, I will not make the thesis available online for three years after submission.

4.2 Data Collection

4.2.1 Factors considered in relation to the data collection

At the time that the data was collected there were some factors which needed to be taken into consideration. The first was that a new vice-chancellor was in post and there were expectations of internal changes among staff, fuelled by the recent fee setting for 2012 entrants and the probable impact of this on student expectations about their learning experience. The second was that the main service department supporting learning and teaching had been through a period of restructure around which there were some sensitivities.

Another consideration was that I was not only the researcher but also the manager of a large proportion of the people I hoped would participate in the research. As a service director, I was also senior to most of the people outside my own service whose participation was desirable. I was comparatively new to the institution, and therefore unknown to many of the people who were invited to participate.

All of these factors required me to consider the best way to seek participants and also to keep in mind the potential issues both when carrying out the research and when analysing the data.

4.2.2 Document and website study

I studied a range of institutional documents (listed in Appendix 1), most of which were obtained through the university website. These included mission and strategy documents, particularly those relating to learning and teaching, and policy and operational documents which dealt with staff, in particular professional services staff. I also looked at faculty and professional services webpages with a view to seeing how far they reflected the institution level documents and how they presented their staff.

With three exceptions, all documents were freely accessible for staff of the University. The first of these exceptions was a HR strategy report dated 2008. The second was two

documents about professional services behaviours which were being developed as part of a project by a network of northern university HR staff. These were all made available to me on request. The third was a briefing document which had been prepared for me by my line manager when I started in post and which was not publicly shared.

4.2.3 Survey

The initial stage in the data collection was the use of a survey carried out by means of a questionnaire which participants completed electronically (Appendix 2). The survey was piloted in the main service department providing support for learning and teaching in the institution, namely the Academic Enhancement Unit. Five participants completed the questionnaire and then offered feedback, either through an email accompanying the completed questionnaire or in a short meeting. The feedback raised an ethical concern, a difficulty relating to answering two of the questions and a formatting problem.

The questionnaire asked participants to provide their post title. The reason for this was that I was interested to discover the number and range of post titles and to see if they reflected the work participants mentioned as being set out in their job descriptions. One pilot participant pointed out that this made participants potentially identifiable if, like theirs, the post title was unique in the organisation. Four participants found two of the questions difficult to answer because the only response options provided were 'yes' or 'no'. Two of those participants made additional comments on these questions in the questionnaire itself and two raised the problem in the feedback meeting.

As a result of the feedback, the information for prospective participants was amended to explain why job titles were being asked for and additional reassurance given that providing these would not result in participants being identifiable. The two questions which had proved difficult to answer had 'not sure' added to the yes/no answer options and an optional comments box added. The formatting problem was also resolved.

The survey was then opened to self-selecting participants working in service departments and faculties who identified themselves as 'supporting learning and

teaching'. This was deliberately not defined in order to allow for maximum participation from staff across the institution and to enable me to discover how broadly the concept of learning and teaching support was defined by participants themselves. Two service heads were asked to encourage staff in their departments to participate. Requests for pilot participants had shown that there would be a good number of willing participants in the service I led, but I hoped to obtain data from other areas to ensure balance. Invitation to express interest in participating was sent by open email and those who responded were individually emailed the information for prospective participants (Appendix 3), the consent form (Appendix 4) and the questionnaire (Appendix 5). Because I was concerned that I might find it difficult to find enough participants, I did not attempt to ensure different age range or gender representation. However, I was aware that the salary grade criterion would probably exclude the early career and therefore younger professional services staff.

4.2.4 Interviews

The survey findings confirmed the broad areas I wanted to examine and also indicated some areas which were potentially more significant than I had initially anticipated. They also confirmed my original view that using interviews for the second stage of the data collection was an appropriate method.

When they completed the survey, participants were invited to indicate if they were willing to consider being interviewed at a later date, and ten participants stated willingness. Of these, eight from professional services were contacted and invited to an interview; all accepted. One person who had initially declined to participate in the survey also offered to be interviewed. In making the selection, I tried to ensure that the range of participants included staff from different professional services, and different grades. While I did not select to ensure a mix of age and gender, I considered this once I had a list of participants and noted that it had been obtained without deliberate action. In addition to the people who had volunteered to participate, I approached the director of one of the key services and two members of staff who were experienced, but who had

previously worked in faculties and were working in comparatively new posts in the service I led, as I thought this would be an interesting perspective to explore. Faculty-based staff who had responded to the survey were not invited to participate in the interview stage as I considered that the small number who had taken part would not make a comparative view possible, nor did I know if they were on the same grade as those in the professional services.

I also requested an interview with the director of Human Resources to ask about policy and plans related to professional services staff. A different set of prompts was used in this interview. This interview was held after the other interviews had been completed to ensure that I did not ask the participants additional questions based on my understanding of the director's views of the institution's aims and policy in this area. As she was identifiable through her post title, I discussed this with her and she gave her permission to include it. I considered that this interview would, together with data from the document and website study, assist in providing triangulation of the survey and other interview data.

As the survey and interview respondents had a free choice with regard to participating in the research, consideration of non-response bias of the sample is needed, although this has not been formally estimated. With regard to the survey, the total number of possible respondents could not be calculated, since the survey was open to any service staff who self-identified their role as 'supporting learning and teaching'. No follow-up asking for reasons for not participating was carried out and therefore no common cause can be identified, although lack of interest, time pressure and fears relating to confidentiality may have been issues. Fogliani (1999) points out that: 'non response bias can have significant detrimental effects on the accuracy of survey estimates' (p. 16). For this reason, generalising from the sample would be inadvisable. With regard to the interview participant sample, two relevant professional services were under-represented. As two well-represented services were led by me and by a director whose interview responses

revealed an interest in professionalism, it would again be inappropriate to generalise on the basis of the interview findings.

A number of issues needed consideration because I was interviewing colleagues, in addition to those already mentioned above. My line manager agreed that the interviews should take place during working hours so that participants would not have to give up their own time. While this was generous, it was potentially likely to signal that this was a work-related activity. The location of the interviews was therefore an issue. It was necessary to find a neutral room which would be free of interruptions, which excluded my office, or those of participants, even if they had a single occupancy room. I invited participants to come to the building I worked in, but chose a small meeting room. Although participants who worked in the same service as me would know this room, they would not associate it with my managerial role.

The conduct of the interview, particularly the start, also required thought. Participants were given the information about the research again and asked to sign the consent form. I used this as an opportunity to emphasise the purpose of the research and that it was independent of my work role. I also considered the language I would need to use in the interviews in order to reassure participants, build trust and encourage them to express their views.

I used the first three interviews as a pilot as well as a source of data and then reviewed the structure and the question areas. While I was satisfied that the interviews had broadly covered what I had set out to explore, I considered that the focus on role and identity in relation to learning and teaching support had not been sufficiently examined. I also went back to the three participants to ask if they had any comments to make about the interviews. No suggestions or negative comments were offered. After the first three interviews, I also arranged the seating, as I had let participants choose where they wanted to sit with the result that we had sat directly opposite each other across a table. On reflection, I thought this was too formal and slightly intimidating.

As I had anticipated, my status as an 'insider-outsider' researcher raised some issues in the interview process. The nature of the enquiry meant that I was asking some staff

members that I managed to express their perceptions about sensitive areas, such as how they perceived they were valued. In a few cases, there were hesitations before replying that I considered were not due to the participant thinking about the answer but due to their wondering whether it was safe to say what they thought. I also considered that in some cases participants were trying to guess what I wanted to hear. While such concerns can arise regardless of the status of the researcher, the fact that I was an insider but my ability to respect confidentiality not yet known was likely to have exacerbated this. Staff on more senior grades and staff that I did not line manage, although wary when discussing some areas, appeared to be more at ease with being interviewed.

I also expected that some participants, particularly those in the service I led, might want to present a positive picture of themselves and the institution, and therefore be unwilling to express any views that could be seen as critical or negative. When I analysed the data, this concern proved to be unfounded.

Seven interviews were carried out in December 2011. Pressure of work for both me and the participants in my area prevented me from carrying out any further interviews until February-April 2012 when a further five took place, followed by the interview with the director of Human Resources. In these interviews, I ensured that more attention was paid to learning and teaching support. The interviews were recorded and handwritten notes made during the interviews. Because of the pressure of time, I paid for the interviews to be transcribed in two stages after the separate blocks of interviews. During the gap between the two stages of interviewing, I listened again to the first set of recordings, edited the transcripts and made some additional notes, but did not start coding. After the second set were transcribed, I edited the transcripts and prepared to code them.

4.3 Coding and analysis of the data

With regard to the analysis of data in case studies, the importance of examining emerging patterns is highlighted (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2005). At the same time, the need to ensure that all data are examined, even where particular questions have been explored,

and the importance of the triangulation of data in case study are both emphasised by Yin. Stake considers that rival interpretations need to be considered: ‘Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case. The interview is the main road to multiple realities’ (p. 64).

There is also considerable discussion in writing on research methodology on the dangers of the analysis of data obtained through interviewing, either because of issues relating to the conscious or unconscious selection or omission of what is said by the researcher, or because there are questions concerning reliability and validity of the data obtained in interviewing (Silver, 1977; Miles and Huberman, 1994), issues which are also discussed in relation to qualitative research in general.

The practical methods for analysis, for example the coding and display of data, are also examined in the literature, which highlights the importance of the coherence of the methods and the overall research design and the approach it is grounded in, and the relationship between these and the researcher’s values (Miles and Huberman, 1994, Sikes: 2006; Halliday, 2002; Fairclough, 2003; Cresswell, 2008). The need for ongoing consideration of the data and researcher reflexivity, and for the development of propositions based on findings and conclusions are also key themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Validity is also a highlighted issue. The interpretation of the findings of qualitative research is discussed in relation to such considerations as wider context, comparison with other studies and researcher reflections, and the limitations of the research (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Gewirtz and Crib, 2006; Clough and Nutbrown, 2007; Halliday, 2002; Cresswell, 2008). Halliday exemplifies a widely expressed view in commenting on the relationship between meaning and values when he states that:

‘meaning cannot be reported in a way that is independent of the observer because she or he has to understand what is being said and this implicates them in the subject of their research’ (p.51).

The work of Fairclough (2003) on critical discourse analysis (CDA), in particular regarding Foucault’s (1972) ideas about the socially constructive effects of discourse and Bourdieu and Wacquant’s (2001) views on the performative power of language is also significant. Although Fairclough places CDA within the critical social research

paradigm, since it has an emancipatory aim, it can also be considered in relation to interpretive approaches, as it aims for a wide understanding of social phenomena and the relationship between discourse and social practice, in particular the relationship between discourse and representation, and the constitution of identity. Fairclough highlights the importance of vocabulary and the semantic relationship between words in discourse, which has implications for the analysis of written text and interview data in case study.

4.3.1 Data from documentation and webpages

I used a similar approach to the analysis of the data taken from institutional webpages and documents as I used for the interview data. I started with broad headings and added sub-headings as I read. I then cut and pasted text into tabular form and coded it, using the same codes as for the interview data, where appropriate. As well providing a clear view of the organised data, this also enabled cross-referencing with the interview data.

4.3.2 Survey data

The survey was completed by individual participants and sent to me electronically. Completed surveys were allocated a respondent number and the responses of each were placed in a table which was organised in line with the survey question areas. Some of the responses were yes/no but others consisted of a list, for example of qualifications, or an expression of views, for example on perceptions of being valued. The quantitative data were then extracted from the first table and placed in section-based tables, and the qualitative data were noted under table section sub-headings and analysed for emerging themes. The data enabled me to create a roles diagram which was used as a prompt in the interviews.

4.3.3 Interview data

Although the interviews were semi-structured, the guide list of areas to explore which I had used in all the interviews ensured that I had a number of broad headings under which to organise the data. Participants were given a number and the tapescripts organised numerically. I began by printing and hand coding transcripts but found this unwieldy and began again, this time working online. Initially I created a table with the broad headings related to the areas I had focussed on, such as ‘qualifications’ and ‘value’ and then added in sub-headings as I read, re-read and coded the transcribed interviews. Finally I read the transcripts with a view to seeing what had emerged that I had not asked about specifically, but which was relevant to the area of enquiry. A sample page of the coded data is attached as Appendix 6 and a sample page of the coding table as Appendix 7.

Chapter Five: Research findings

The findings from the data collected through the survey, interviews and scrutiny of the institution's documents and webpages are reported below. This includes analysis of the survey data, as this informed the subsequent interviews.

5.1. Survey findings

A total of twenty two people, including those who participated in the pilot, completed and returned the questionnaire. Of these, twenty worked in centrally located professional services and two in Faculties. Of the professional services respondents, fifteen worked in the main service supporting learning and teaching, where I also work. I had over-estimated the number of responses I would obtain, in particular outside the department I work in. This may be because I had not met many of the staff who were contacted and was reliant on the information sent electronically, or in some cases, the support of line managers who I knew, but not well. Since the pilot had shown me that potential identification was an issue, I consider that this was a concern that may have affected some people's decision not to participate. Others may have found the questions difficult or uncomfortable to answer, may not have been interested, or simply felt they could not give the time needed to complete it.

5.1.1 Posts and roles

Out of the twenty two participants, only two had the same post titles. Another two titles were possibly the same but one of the postholders was not sure of his/her post title. In other words, there were twenty different post titles. Of these, four made explicit reference to learning and/or teaching support. A further five gave post titles where someone with a knowledge of higher education would be able to guess that this support was included the post.

The following roles were mentioned in the post titles (Table 1):

Table 1: Roles in post titles

Post title	No.
Head	5
Co-ordinator	5
Officer	5
Developer	2
Advisor	3
Administrator	1
Associate Director	1

5.1.2 Aspects of learning and teaching support covered in posts

Respondents identified twenty five different areas of work, which they saw as supporting learning and teaching. Those mentioned more than once are shown below (Table 2).

Table 2: Areas of learning and teaching support covered in posts

Area of learning and teaching support	No. of staff identifying area as aspect of post
Staff Development	12
Quality assurance	5
Curriculum design/development	5
Learning and teaching development/academic enhancement/education development	4
Technology Enhanced Learning	3
Student experience	2

‘Staff development’ was mentioned by a range of post holders and included reference to briefing, training and developing staff in relation to other areas mentioned, such as Technology Enhanced Learning.

Five areas mentioned were not recognisable as being related to learning and teaching, for example ‘marketing and publicity’, but were mentioned as such by respondents. It was not clear whether they had included the areas because they were part of their job

descriptions or because they did involve support for learning and teaching, although not further explained.

5.1.3 Posts and job descriptions

Participants were asked to refer to their job descriptions when completing the survey. Twelve people stated that their job descriptions made specific reference to learning and teaching support and a further three thought that they might do. Four people stated that their job descriptions made no reference to learning and teaching support. Two people were not sure what their job descriptions were and one person stated that they did not have one.

In nine cases, areas of learning and teaching support identified as being part of their work were stated by respondents to be outside their job description.

Comments were also made about posts changing or ‘morphing’, and about job descriptions not informing daily work.

Eight respondents stated that their job description included person specifications relating to learning and teaching support. Of these, two listed duties rather than person specifications. On examination, the specifications listed proved to be a mixture of learning and teaching related items, for example: ‘at least 3 years appropriate experience of supporting learning in an HE context’, and more general requirements, such as: ‘ability to take sometimes complex information and convey it in a succinct way, easily understood by a diverse array of people’. This may be because respondents simply cut and pasted items from their job descriptions or it may reflect their understanding of what constitutes learning and teaching support related person specifications.

5.1.4 Skills required

Thirteen respondents stated that their posts required specialist skills, and over twenty one were identified. However, there was a wide interpretation of ‘specialist’. For

example, the most frequently mentioned specialist skill was ‘interpersonal and communication skills’. Frequently mentioned specialist skills included skills in coaching, facilitation, research and leadership and management.

5.1.5 Postholders’ qualifications

Respondents were asked to state their highest level academic qualifications. All but one held Bachelor degree level qualifications or above. Four had doctorates, eight Masters level degrees, four Bachelor level degrees and five held Postgraduate Certificates or Diplomas. Fourteen identified themselves as having learning and teaching related qualifications. A further sixteen identified themselves as having professional qualifications, although those listed included qualifications that would not be publicly recognised as ‘professional’, such as IT proficiency certificates.

Respondents were not all clear as to whether their qualifications were a requirement for the post. This is because in some cases they could not remember, or did not have a person specification as part of their job description. However, it may also be because the question did not specify whether it was a requirement for obtaining the post, that is, a criterion for appointment, or whether it was ‘required’ in order for them to be able to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the post effectively.

5.1.6 Postholders’ experience

The majority of respondents had been working in higher education, and more than half in learning and teaching related work before taking up their current posts (*Table 3*).

Table 3: Respondents’ experience

Work experience	No. of respondents
Previous experience	19
Previous experience in HE	18
Learning and teaching related experience	13
Teaching experience	4

Again, some references were made to posts themselves changing, which respondents had included as previous experience.

5.1.7 Motivation for taking posts

All but two of the respondents had made a deliberate decision to work in areas which supported learning and teaching. While there were a range of motivational factors, the promotion of social good was the leading factor (Table 4).

Table 4: Motivations for taking posts in learning and teaching support

Motivations	No. of respondents
Help others achieve their goals/potential including support for widening access, social benefit	9
Use skills/experience	6
Natural next step/continuation/development of previous work	5
Interested in learning-related work area	2
Change of career direction	1
Looking for new challenge and opportunity to learn new skills	1
Interest in working with academics	1
Motivated to lead/ manage others (and support services) and increase impact on student experience	1
Explore potential of technology by working with people	1
Personal development/continuing education	1
*Post met main professional interest (Information Management)	1
*Previous post unfulfilling	1

*Posts in learning and teaching support not deliberately chosen

One respondent commented that: ‘it was more a negotiation and evolving into the current role than a black and white decision to apply for learning and teaching roles’.

Another respondent remarked on the impact of the post on their identity: ‘I had to change/adjust my academic identity by moving to a more generic pedagogic research area’.

5.1.8 Relationship with academic and other professional services staff

All but one respondent liaised with academic staff, and all but one with other professional services staff as part of their work. In twenty cases, the respondent stated that either they or the academic staff member would initiate joint working. In eighteen cases, the source of initiation when working with other professional services staff also varied.

5.1.9 Perceptions of role and work being valued

Over half of the respondents stated that they were not sure whether their work was valued by academic staff and half were unsure whether it was valued by professional services staff.

Comments relating to how academic staff viewed their role and work mentioned how this varied according to the academic staff member’s priorities and attitude, the level of their interaction with the respondent’s department, the difficulty in measuring the impact of their work on academic staff and the time it takes to establish credibility. One respondent commented:

‘I think it is appreciated by some academic staff but others may regard it as irrelevant and some may regard it as “interfering” and an imposition’.

With regard to how other professional staff viewed their work, respondents’ comments mention that where individuals worked closely together and where the respondent’s role was ‘clear/distinct’ they would be valued, and also have a positive impact on the services involved

5.1.10 Analysis of the survey data

Analysis of the survey data suggested a number of themes to pursue through interviews, either by suggesting that previous hypotheses were worth pursuing or by indicating additional areas to those previously considered.

The first of these concerns the relationship between post title and role, duties and responsibilities which emerges as weak. Writing on academic staff perceptions discussed in Chapter Three shows that the range of post titles for professional services staff and what they convey about the posts, in comparison with academic staff post titles for example, is potentially confusing. However, the survey data showed that it is also confusing for the postholders themselves and indicated that it would be useful to explore through the interviews how important staff think their titles are both in relation to how they see their post and how they are perceived by others.

In relation to this, the data indicated that job descriptions and post specifications are not always complete, and do not necessarily reflect work carried out, suggesting that it would be useful to explore how staff members' understanding of their roles is obtained and how it is communicated to others.

Another area that I had already intended to explore, but which emerged as potentially more important than I had expected, came from the data relating to qualifications and skills, which showed that there is no distinctly emerging or shared understanding of the terms 'professional', 'specialist', 'learning and teaching related'. Since these might be expected to be important factors in how the relevant staff groups perceive their role identity, this confirmed that I needed to explore this through interviews where they could be considered in more depth.

References in the data to changes and 'morphing' of posts also emerged as necessary to enquire about further as part of the exploration of whether staff perceptions suggest that 'third space' working is developing in the institution.

Data relating to motivation for taking up posts also suggested that this may have a distinct impact on perceptions of identity. In particular, I wanted to explore further the indications the data gave of the similarity between motivational factors for professional services staff and academic staff.

Finally, respondents' views about how far their work is valued was an area I had already intended to explore. The data suggested that this is an area of some uncertainty and I considered that interviews would enable this theme to be considered in more depth.

5.2. Interview findings

Note: Comments made by interview participants and quoted below are referenced using the letters IP (interview participant) and their participant number.

The twelve interview participants were located in the following services areas, all of which include a learning and teaching focus: Academic Enhancement Unit (8); Library and Student Support (3); Graduate Development Centre (1). Six had managerial roles at various levels. Participants held posts that were graded in a range between Grade 7 and director level, which is similar to the grade range within which academic staff are placed.

5.2.1 Roles covered

The interview findings supported those of the survey in confirming that participants saw their posts as covering a varying number of the learning and teaching support roles under the broad areas shown in the roles diagram (*fig. 2*). All participants mentioned at least two of the areas when describing their work. Participants whose key role related to quality assurance did not identify as many areas as those in other posts, the majority of whom saw themselves as having a range of roles, excluding quality assurance. The exception to this was some of the participants from Library and Student Support who mentioned quality assurance as being part of their work. The restructuring which had resulted in the creation of the Academic Enhancement Unit was seen by some

participants to have helped to link quality assurance to other areas, including by the participant who commented that:

‘... most people would probably agree but I would say that quality wasn’t perceived to be anything to do with learning and teaching.’ (IP10)

In contrast, a participant from the Academic Practice team considered ‘that good teaching is predicated around a good quality infrastructure’ (IP9).

Activities not included in the roles diagram were also mentioned, including teaching by one participant and the enhancement of learning and teaching space by another.

Learning support activities encompassed in the roles mentioned included facilitating a shared practice forum for academic staff, coaching academic staff and supporting their skills development, targeting specific staff in some cases. One participant commented on the need for flexibility in that their role depended to a certain extent on what academic staff wanted from them.

Three participants mentioned work which was part of their role but which was not featured in the diagram and which was not directly related to learning and teaching support, such as budget management and general administration.

For a number of participants, project work was a significant part of their role which was viewed as adding to role variety and scope but, in some cases, as also contributing to stress.

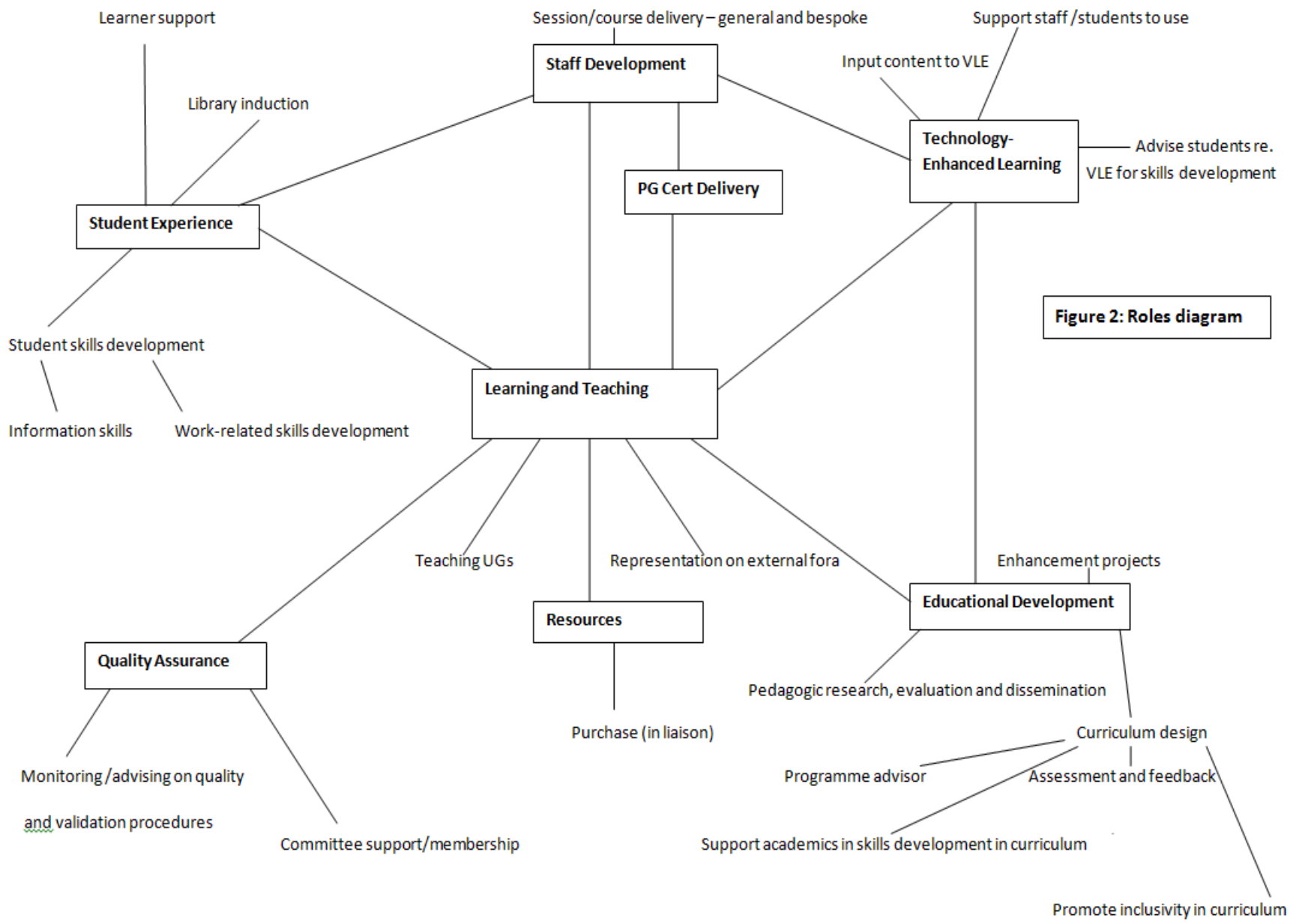


Figure 2: Roles diagram

5.2.2 Understanding and description of role

The majority of participants found it difficult to explain their roles clearly, although they were able to map what they did against the broad roles in the roles diagram when prompted. The most common perception was that posts were what one participant described as ‘an assembly of parts’, which was borne out by participants’ comments about the number of roles in the diagram that their posts involved. After struggling to explain, one participant decided on a ‘broader support role in terms of ... how [*academic staff*] functioned in what they were doing’ (IP4) as a description. Some participants considered that their work spanned all the areas in the diagram, one adding that it was easier to say which areas their role did not cover, rather than what was included, while others thought their roles were limited to one or two of the areas. Only two participants were confident in outlining their roles, one stating that it was ‘very clean, very clear’, and another identifying quickly and unhesitatingly the key focus of their work.

The difficulty in clarifying role was also demonstrated when participants commented on how they described their roles to others. Words such as ‘nebulous’, ‘woolly’, ‘confusion’, ‘problematic’ and ‘complicated’ were used, and participants spoke hesitantly when trying to explain how they approached this. Some participants were not sure what their post titles were and all participants except one, whose post title included the words ‘staff development’, thought that their titles needed to be explained or glossed in some way and that details of activities carried out needed to be provided. Similarly, roles were not perceived to be recognised in the way that traditional professions would be, as a participant with a learning development role commented: ‘... it’s not simple, you can’t just say I’m a teacher, I’m a lawyer, I’m a, it’s, it’s a very nebulous’ (IP1).

It was generally considered to be easier to explain roles within the institution than to outsiders, and several participants commented that they provided examples when explaining their roles to outsiders, because the nature of their work would not be readily understood:

‘I get asked that a lot, you phone up insurance companies and they’re “what do you do”. It is problematic to explain to someone externally what a learning technologist is.’ (IP2)

Some participants fell back on approximate descriptions which they thought would be familiar, as exemplified by the participant quoted above who stated that: ‘I say I teach the lecturers’.

While participants expected or believed that some staff within the institution would have a clearer idea about their role than those outside it, several commented that it was still not always easy to summarise their role. One participant considered this was because of the development of new post titles: ‘job titles now didn’t exist six years ago, there’s ... different terms ... terminology’ (IP5). The same participant noted the need to be able to ‘sell’ their post, particularly to academic staff, when describing it and to be able to use language that would ‘switch into their interests’. A manager pointed out that her post title was not ‘a term that generally tripped off people’s tongues yet’ (IP10). Three participants relied on describing their own roles and those of their staff in terms they thought would be readily understood by the listener, even if they knew these were not accurate, one using ‘customer service’ to explain her quality enhancement role and another commenting that: ‘I quite often use the word librarians although that’s not in their job title, and I manage the book budget and they understand that’ (IP6). The third stated that sometimes she felt it was too much trouble to explain. However, an additional different view about titles was expressed by the second of these participants quoted who considered that:

‘... the word library and the word librarian can encompass an awful lot, it doesn’t need to be the traditional view ... people will understand certain things included in that word and they will expect certain things’ (IP6).

One participant felt their post title was misleading because it included the word ‘brokerage’, which was generally thought to indicate that the postholder worked in a financial institution.

Two participants stated that the complicated nature of their roles and the difficulty in describing it to others caused them anxiety, partly because of the lack of boundaries, although one of them noted that for a different person the lack of role definition might

be empowering. This view was borne out to a certain extent by the positive comments made by two other participants about the creative possibilities their posts allowed for.

Other positive perceptions were also expressed. One participant commented on using the need to describe roles as an opportunity to emphasise professional identity:

‘I have been using the word, actively using the word, professionalism and referring to our staff who support learning and teaching as professional services staff and making reference to professional standards wherever possible so it’s become ... it’s evident in my vocabulary now in a very conscious way’ (IP8).

Another remarked that it was necessary to ensure that aspects of the team’s roles were ‘in people’s eyes’, both academic and services staff. Both of these participants had managerial roles and commented at several points in their interviews on the communication of role and identity to people within and outside their teams.

Recognition of role in relation to the institutional context was expressed by several participants. As might be expected, managers were able to articulate this more explicitly, as exemplified by one who stated that:

‘I think we see the core of the University as teaching, learning and research and we see our role as not just supporting that but contributing to it and enhancing it ... and being leaders in our own specific area’ (IP6).

Her perception was that the skills of her service team made the institution ‘strong’ and that while it was aligned with institutional learning and teaching strategy, her team had its own clear ideas regarding its aims.

5.2.3 Perceptions of qualifications in relation to role

Eight participants thought that a first degree was required for either their current posts or the post to which they were originally recruited in the institution. However, several participants were unsure what had been required and only three referred to other qualifications. These included the Post-Graduate Certificate in Higher Education or Higher Education Academy accreditation which was a requirement for the Head of the Academic Practice team post, and a PhD requirement for a post which included conducting research into higher education. One manager commented that staff working

in Library and Student Support were now required to have a Library Information Science qualification. One participant had created the qualifications requirement for their post when a job evaluation scheme, the Higher Education Role Analysis (HERA) was carried out in the institution:

‘... it said that you had to fill in your own paperwork and it did say about qualifications and knowledge and understanding and I did put, I put a Masters in, or I sort of said I suppose you know, you know to show, to demonstrate that you can you know, that sort of level of knowledge, intellect, that kind of thing ... and my then manager then signed it off’ (IP1).

The requirement to have a degree was seen by participants as understandable in an academic institution, comments such as ‘a degree, obviously’ and ‘the degree was important’ exemplifying this. One participant perceived a direct link between qualification and preparedness for role: ‘It’s a professional service within a university, so I have shown that I have knowledge or academic qualifications’ (IP12).

There was little other comment made about the relevance of the qualification to post or to the need for, or the lack of, professional qualifications, the exception being managers working in Library and Student Support.

5.2.4 Perceptions of skills, knowledge and experience in relation to role

Participants were mostly uncertain as to what experience was a post requirement, Library and Student Support staff again being exceptions. Requirements mentioned for specific posts were related to knowledge and broad experience. Three participants referred to knowledge requirements relating to the institution’s virtual learning environment (VLE), commerce and the university itself. Requirements for experience of working in ‘education’, in higher education administration and in ‘quality’ were also mentioned, and participants with a managerial role referred to ‘relevant professional experience in leadership and management’ and ‘basic stuff like time management, delegation’. Participants mentioned person specifications relating to specific posts including training, communication and dissemination skills, IT skills, problem solving skills, the ability to ‘deal professionally with people’ and diplomacy. One participant

commented that the person specification for their academic practice post was very general:

‘I don’t think there was anything that you, that any person working in a university wouldn’t have ... I can’t think there was anything that was specific ... it was a very generic job description really ... you could have come straight, you could have always been in the centre’ (IP9).

The participant added that she did not understand how anyone could do her job that did not have similar academic experience to her own, since this would not be ‘authentic’, but that: ‘people do it ... plenty of people lead PG Certs who’ve never taught undergraduates’ (IP9).

Participants’ responses supported the survey responses in that they reflected a degree of uncertainty relating to specialist skills. When asked about the specialist skills they thought they needed to carry out their roles, the majority of participants were either unable to say what these were, or unsure how to differentiate between general and specialist skills, as exemplified by this comment:

‘It depends how you define specialist skills, when you say that I think of, you know, sort of technical skills, you know, that you can sort of, what about, you know how to use technology or things like that, but when you use the term specialist that’s what I think of’ (IP1).

Skills that participants perceived as being necessary included IT, technical and analytical skills, budget management, thinking strategically and being creative or able to ‘think outside the box’. Managers additionally referred to skills related to staff management, communication, advocacy, innovation and good practice. There was also a perception among participants that people-related skills were important, including diplomacy, networking and the need ‘to go out there and speak to the academic departments on their terms’, together with a recognition that it was currently a skill much in demand: ‘specially at this time when there is a lot of change going through ... and people are frustrated, people are angry’ (IP12).

Appropriate attitudes were also mentioned, such as ‘having a positive attitude as opposed to well, it will never work’ (IP5).

5.2.5 Perceptions of post titles and job descriptions

Post titles exist for all types of posts, some being unique and others shared by a number of people, and are normally reviewed when staff are recruited or when restructuring takes place. They are also meant to be reviewed at a formal annual meeting although participants' comments showed that this does not consistently happen. Commonly occurring terms used in the post titles of both the survey and interview participants included 'co-ordinator', 'officer' and 'developer'. Ten participants commented on their post titles and their views on whether these clarified their roles. Of these, only three considered that the title provided an accurate reflection of their role. The other participants were either unsure of the title themselves, or felt that it did not reflect what they did. One participant did not think it was important, noting that post titles were political and often designed to reflect the current focus of interest in the institution and the sector. Another had compared her title with that of people doing similar work in other institutions, which in her opinion helped to confirm its appropriacy.

The institution provides detailed job descriptions and person specifications for all posts. As with the responses of survey participants, there was some uncertainty about the content of job descriptions. Five participants considered that their job descriptions reflected their roles or guided them in carrying out the roles. Three of the five stated that they had been involved in the development of their job descriptions, as part of a restructuring process. Participants who had not had this involvement did not refer frequently to their job descriptions and in some cases stated they had either not seen one or had not looked at it since their appointment. One considered that the fact that posts evolve made a job description less significant.

There was only one comment on the wording of the job description, the participant commenting negatively on the 'terminology' used.

5.2.6 Perceptions of the impact of staff development on role and identity

Participants were appreciative of the opportunities the institution offered for development, although there were varying levels of awareness as to how this affected their professional identity. Staff with a managerial role were more likely to see the connection between the two, one commenting that:

‘I think it kind of implies throughout the University that you are expected to participate in this and you are expected to keep up to date and keep your standards up and so on’ (IP6).

Another noted that the professional development she had undertaken had increased her awareness of professional values as identified by the Association of University Administrators (AUA), and that she supported staff who wanted to undertake AUA certified training.

With regard to learning and teaching support, development and training opportunities were perceived as important for a number of reasons. These included filling the gaps in learning and teaching related knowledge and experience that staff with an administrative rather than an academic background felt they had, increasing knowledge and awareness of external and sector-wide issues, strengthening participants’ confidence in delivering their role and helping them to demonstrate their expertise to academic staff. A participant with a managerial role commented that she would expect staff to obtain learning and teaching related qualifications if these were appropriate to the post, and some participants evidenced the learning and teaching focussed training and development they had undertaken, such as the Preparing to Teach in Lifelong Learning programme run by the institution. However, the same manager also thought that customer service had been more of a focus than learning and teaching in staff development in her area in recent years. Another manager remarked that the professional development she had undertaken was not focussed on learning and teaching but that because it had involved research it had helped her to have a ‘more academic side and approach’ to her role.

There were varying perceptions of the institution's commitment to staff development and the way this was implemented. One participant compared favourably the 'compulsory development' that she perceived as a requirement with the approach in another university in which she had worked. A different view was expressed by another participant who thought that it was too 'bespoke' and that it depended too much on the individual line manager's approach, rather than there being a systematic approach across the institution.

Professionally focussed development was not universally perceived as helpful, one participant from Library and Student Support, noting that the professional chartered qualification was: '... a bit tendentious and was living in the past, to be honest' (IP7). A participant in a post supporting technology enhanced learning commented positively on the process by which her needs in relation to increasing her technical knowledge and skills were identified and funded by the institution, but did not perceive an impact on her professional identity:

'... not to mine specifically but I can see why it'd be good to have it on my CV and I can see why other institutions or the University would like me to have it' (IP2).

A number of participants indicated that although line managers had to agree their requests for staff development, whether these were determined at their annual meeting or as opportunities arose, it was rare for any request to be ignored. Similarly, very few provided examples of development which had been discussed and agreed at the annual meeting, either to enhance their ability to support learning and teaching or to develop them professionally.

Self and peer development were less frequently mentioned. Only one participant commented on a deliberate focus on the development of professional identity that she and a colleague had attempted. Influenced by Wenger's writing on communities of practice, they had tried to set up a learning community within their own team, conscious that:

‘if you were an academic you would have like a, you know, research meetings or things like that where people could talk about their research interests but it was almost like but we didn’t do that because we were too busy trying to justify our existence and be busy and out and doing things’ (IP1).

5.2.7 Perceptions in relation to external agencies, professional associations and networks

Participants in Library and Student Support and those with a quality support role demonstrated a greater awareness of professional associations and networks than those in other teams. Participants who belonged to professional associations perceived these to have an impact on role and identity, one going so far as to state that ‘you can’t consider yourself a professional unless you do get involved with some of these organisations’ (IP9). The role of associations in helping professional services staff in times of change was commented on by the same participant.

Professional networks were also perceived as contributing to identity formation, one participant in Library and Student Support noting that ‘...it gives you more of a sense that either what you are doing has some validity or you have...key professional things’ (IP7). The importance of being able to benchmark practice was noted by the same participant, who added that this was vital for establishing standards and that: ‘it’s very hard to be a professional without that’ (IP7). A participant with a quality assurance role also mentioned the need to: ‘ensure that you’re up to date with the sector, the QAA and what other institutions are doing...best practice and otherwise’ (IP10). The Professional Standards Framework was also recognised by one participant working in staff development as starting to impact on professional identity by raising people’s expectations. She also commented that:

‘... it’s good to use positive terms and terms that hopefully people will feel proud of ... so I think people want to be part of a profession ..irrespective of what role they perform’ (IP4).

5.2.8 Other factors shaping role and identity

One participant commented that the annual setting of objectives at team and individual level provided more steer as to what was expected than the job description. The importance of the line manager, either in giving direct information about roles or in providing support for carrying them out, was also mentioned by several participants. Additionally, a few participants acknowledged that their line managers had broadened or deepened their roles by giving them specific tasks or projects to carry out. Participants with a line management role were very aware of the need to support their team members' understanding of roles and responsibilities, and professional identity, one manager giving as an example helping them to see what was generic in their roles, and another stating that being a good role model in relation to undertaking ongoing training and development was important. A third line manager saw that:

‘ ... some people come in to roles, in professional roles ... and they don't quite have the skills to be effective in that. So it's my role within the department to ... address that with them' (IP7).

The same manager described involving other professional services staff who support learning and teaching to provide help with this professional skills development so that staff could become 'more robust, better equipped, a bit more confident to do the role' (IP7). Participants also commented on the contribution of their team colleagues to helping them to obtain a clearer or more detailed understanding of what their roles required.

Perceptions of the effectiveness of institutional support for role development were mixed. In some cases it was either unrecognised, or perceived to be lacking or to be ineffectual, as exemplified by a comment on induction: 'I was put in these roles and to be quite frank it was build your own induction' (IP7).

However, the annual Personal Development and Performance Review meeting with a line manager was appreciated as facilitating role development, partly because it was

where possible future responsibilities and role related activities could be planned and agreed. Although the relationship between the ‘staff development’ accessed and role and identity development was not always recognised, participants spoke positively about the range of opportunities offered.

Restructuring was also perceived as influencing participants’ own perceptions, and those of other staff, about their roles. Three members of staff in the Academic Enhancement Unit, where four teams had recently been brought together to support learning and teaching more effectively, noted the impact of the new structure, two commenting that it had resulted in ‘enhancement’ of staff practice in the service, one adding that it had added to ‘our own contribution and our own understanding and insights and therefore practice’ (IP4). The influence of colleagues, as mentioned above, was perceived to have increased through the new structure, and the intention to bring quality assurance and enhancement into one unit was viewed as having had the added value of bringing staff from previously separate service areas together, giving people a clearer idea of their own roles as well as those of their new colleagues.

The institution’s mission and strategy were also perceived by some participants to affect their role and the need to adapt. Additionally, external factors were recognised as having an impact on role. For example, a participant with a role in supporting technology-enhanced learning commented on the impact of new technologies while other participants noted the effects of government policy.

5.2.9 Motivations for taking roles

As might be expected, there were many reasons for applying for or accepting posts. While the survey responses had indicated that the promotion of social good was a key factor, this did not emerge from the interview responses, which suggested a more accidental career trajectory. The majority of interview participants had not planned careers in learning and teaching support, as exemplified by the comment below:

“I guess I’d already been doing it for years before I noticed I was doing it so... it wasn’t a deliberate choice, it’s just something that happened ... it found me” (IP2).

Participants mentioned re-structuring, location of the institution and quality of the facilities, promotion, ‘logical progression’, lack of other opportunities or the possibility of working in a preferred area, the desire to work in an academic environment, the expectation of high standards and a ‘more dedicated audience’, and the benefits offered by a university as explanations of how they came to take up their posts. One participant said her passion for self-education had led her into a library-based role. There was also a range of reasons for staying in posts, including enjoyment of working with students and academics, providing an excellent service, the speed of change, flexible working hours and, in one case, the perception that there could be no return to an academic post.

This lack of deliberate selection of work area was borne out by comments on career progression for professional services staff supporting learning and teaching. The generally expressed perception was that there is no clear career path in learning and teaching support, outside the broad sphere of working in ‘education’. One participant working in Library and Student Support commented on the difficulty in taking the first step on the career ladder and how this had changed during their own career, partly because of the increase in the number of graduates:

‘... it used to be very well defined and there used to be graduate trainee posts. There are very few of those around now, people find it very difficult to get their first professional post’ (IP6).

The participant also noted that the lack of need for their specialist skills had impacted on career possibilities:

‘... you know, people could not get information without professional help. That has just been a complete sea change... and so it’s been a kind of shrinking profession’ (IP6).

Several participants commented on the tendency for roles to ‘morph’, expand or change as a result of restructuring or external drivers, but these were not choices that they had

made. The effect of restructuring was seen by some participants as positive because it brought new role possibilities, but by others as making it necessary to take a broader view of learning and teaching supporting learning and teaching support:

‘I expect now that that has put a different focus on different needs, I think, you know, for the service to operate. And if you’re going to progress you’re looking much wider, you really have to look much wider than what we used to do traditionally’ (IP7).

A different view was that it was easy to become stuck in one area and not to be able to progress because there was a limit to what could be done in ‘higher education administration’ without academic experience.

The career journey already made was not always clear to those who had experienced it; five participants used the expression ‘sort of’ to preface the comments they made about role changes they had experienced, for example. Several participants described the role changes they had undergone as passive experiences as in: ‘I was sort of brought’; ‘I was sort of moved’. The more experienced staff commented on the need to be alert to opportunities as they arose, one person commenting that:

‘I’ve made my own destiny in a way, but it’s because I’ve been doing something on a creative basis and then it led to something else’ (IP4).

Another described how they had created ‘a sort of thread’ for themselves’ because they perceived they were ‘a jack of all trades, master of none’ (IP1).

The shrinking of the public sector was also perceived to be a factor, with some staff expressing the view that as jobs disappeared, people looked for alternatives that would not have been a first or a deliberate choice in other circumstances.

There was no clearly expressed perception of the direction in which participants might progress their careers, and comments were made about career limitations, particularly for staff without ‘academic experience’. Participants working in Library and Student Support expressed a clearer sense of career progression than those in other service areas.

While there was a recognition that staff could move from an academic role to a professional services role, the opposite or a 'return' journey were both considered to be impossible. Also, academic colleagues saw the move to professional services as a negative step, as one participant who had made the move noted:

'most people urged me not to do it ...even when I got the job. You know, most friends in the Faculty... [gap] ... it was seen as a step back and erm ... by my colleagues very much so' (IP9).

The participant also noted her own uncertainty about the change, commenting that if restructuring had not been taking place in the faculty she was in, she might not have applied for the post, but she had felt that learning and teaching was being 'removed' and replaced by a greater focus on research in the faculty and this had influenced her decision to apply.

The director of Human Resources commented on staff motivations for choosing a role in learning and teaching support, noting that:

'... people go in to an organisation, probably in a sort of general administrative, what used to be called clerical capacity ... and they like the environment ... we're a good employer ...[gap]... So I think they come in by some sort of chance ...'cos there's a job that they can do, they apply for it ... and then what happens is they like the environment so they then start to look at what opportunities so it isn't a planned career choice ... and it isn't necessarily a planned career path either' (IP13).

This view supported the comments of some of the participants in relation to the direction their careers had taken.

5.2.10 Impact of role and 'professional services' on identity

Professional identity was not generally mentioned by participants unless prompted. There was a split between those participants whose comments suggested a perception that their identity had been created by the roles their posts comprised and those whose

comments suggested a perception that their identities were already well established before they took on the roles. However, all participants who commented on this relationship perceived that the roles themselves had contributed to the development of their professional identity. Two of these participants viewed themselves as 'educationalists', one as a 'practitioner of the arts' and one as 'running a business information service'. The relationship between role and identity was clearly perceived by some participants but not all, the most explicit comment on this showing that the participant recognised that there was no shared view on this:

'...it's your identity, isn't it, and some people come to work and they do a job, and then they go home and that's it, you know. But others it's sort of you, your beliefs about yourself, your own sort of value and things like that get tied in to how you are perceived but then they can also sort of hamstring you a bit. It's the baggage that you, the baggage that you come with and that baggage can either help you, you know, get on to your destination or it can be a burden. And it's sort of, it's unpicking that ... [gap] ... And it's the extent to which people sort of associate their identity with their job' (IP1).

The effects of changes in higher education and of re-structuring were perceived by managerial staff to have had a direct effect on their identity and how they portrayed this to others. One manager described the change in the way she presented herself and her service team:

'I think I've always considered myself to be a professional. I haven't just banged on about it because it's, you know in some respects you kind of think, well ... why would you need to ... but now I think there's actually a need to do it because I find, I have found myself justifying our existence ... and wanting to survive within a very changing environment whereby I think it's important that you can hold your own and claim your professionalism ... and evidence it, yes. And if you don't then, then again you're potentially enabling others to go, well we don't really need that, need them' (IP 4).

A similar view was held by another manager who thought that the debate as to whether professional librarians were necessary in higher education had also had a significant impact on professional practice, particularly with regard to embracing change.

Professional services was a term that some staff felt comfortable with or were actively trying to use, as in the case of one manager who saw it as preferable to terms previously used in the institution:

‘I never really liked the references to manual staff and support staff because it was just too, well, I think one is derogatory and the other one I think is too vague ... [gap] ... I like the term Professional Services, it’s much better than non-academic ... or non-teaching or anything that’s negative’ (IP8).

However, she also considered that it was not always recognised that her service was driving ‘the business’ forwards as much as the faculties were.

There was no shared view of what the terms ‘professional’ and ‘professional services’ meant. One participant provided a definition of the latter, stating: ‘it’s how you support users of higher education outside of the teaching side’ (IP7), and another thought that: ‘it gives a business focused approach to the university in the way the university does business as opposed to haphazard approach’ (IP5). Some found the term unhelpful partly because it was too ‘wide’ and could ‘mean anything’. This contrasted with views of traditional professions which required specific qualifications and professional development and which were seen as ‘ripped down’, ‘definite’ and ‘defined’. For one participant, being professional was partly to do with ‘image’ or people’s expectations as to what their role involved, as well as the values espoused. Similarly, other professional services, such as those relating to marketing or finance, were perceived as having clearer ‘boundaries’. There was a level of uncertainty about the term ‘professional services’, one participant expressing the view that it was a problem because professional services relating to education was still a developing and ‘emerging’ area.

The range of activities and responsibilities involved in their posts made it hard for some participants to have a clear sense of identity or community, one describing himself as a ‘fence sitter’ because of the different work he was called on to carry out and the many people he had to liaise with. The two participants who had previously held academic posts also found it harder to say who they identified with, one stating after some thought that:

‘It’s difficult to say, although I am academic inside ... and I do sympathise with all bits of issues ... and that and problems the academics experience ... themselves. Er, I think ... I’m probably a researcher, I’m probably, this is how I see myself’ (IP3).

One participant from Library and Student Support noted that the IT staff who had joined them as a result of a team merger were ‘alienated’ because of their ‘strong culture’, adding that:

‘we weren’t even aware of that they found it very difficult, even to talk to us ...’cos we talked a language and we had certain norms and values that we weren’t even aware that we had’ (IP6).

In some cases professionalism was perceived to be about behaviours, one participant expressing the view that they were not currently doing their job in a very professional way but could do so if it were a requirement. Another gave behaviours as an example of their identification with professional services as in this example:

‘... it does shape, yes, my priorities and my whole attitude. So if I’ve got, I look through my emails and I’ve got kind of someone’s approaching a request I’m addressing it first because I do realise I’m service person’ (IP12).

There was not a strong sense of a professional services community for learning and teaching and where there was perceived to be one, several participants commented that they felt like outsiders:

‘... maybe but a little bit on the outside of it, that’s the problem. I feel, you feel very removed even from that so I sort of, I don’t sit in that group. I don’t sort of ... sit anywhere’ (IP1).

The same participant though that this lack of community was something that differentiated support staff from academic staff:

‘... if you were an academic you would have like a, you know, research meetings or things like that where people could talk about their research interests but it was almost like but we didn’t do that because we were too busy trying to justify our existence and be busy and out and doing things’ (IP1).

The participant who had provided a definition of professional services (IP7, above) commented on feeling like part of a learning and teaching support community but also a

wider professional services community, although this was an exception. In general, comments supported the view of the participant who saw the different services as insular in their outlook and behaviour.

5 2.11 Perceptions on the impact of working with academic staff and professional services staff on identity

Participants' comments evidenced a wish to find ways of working effectively with both academic and professional services colleagues. Where this was not achieved, this affected the sense of identity:

‘No I don't feel ... recognised at all as being connected ... with, at best, the academic community here. I've always been, I've always felt that they, I'm seen and regarded as an outsider ... why do you want to be interested in this, what's it got to do with you. And then as a threat oddly enough ... 'cos, you know, I might have to impose something ... that is, you know, the requirement to do' (IP4).

The same participant also commented on the division between academic and professional services communities, a division that the participant did not consider to represent their preferred relationship:

‘... it's that entrenched, you know, they're in one camp we're in another camp, you know, it's ... them and us' (IP4).

Partnership was actively sought by some participants who perceived that 'approach and style' were vital in establishing such relationships. For participants with a 'educational' role such as those working in the Academic Practice team, this was perceived to be easier to achieve either because their skills were well regarded or because they were working together with academic staff, rather than requiring them to carry out, for example, a quality assurance procedure.

A participant who had come into a managerial role from a freelance consultancy role noted the change in relationship with the academic community that the new post brought:

‘It was a bit strange though ... because there was, there was a lack of sort of, almost overnight that I was now no longer impartial, I was somebody who they’d formerly trusted but I don’t know what it was, it was perceived as a kind of distancing really’ (IP4).

The same participant noted that it was difficult to change attitudes:

‘I’ve, you know, I kind of fought for a while and then I just backed off and I thought well, you know, sod you basically. I’m not going to, you know, put up with this ...and then at the same time you know, if it’s required of the University then it is and that’s that, you know, like it or lump it, it’s going to happen’ (IP4).

5.2.12 Perceptions of value and professional identity

The interview responses confirmed the uncertainty expressed in the survey responses concerning perceptions of value. There were mixed views expressed in relation to value and identity, in terms of both how participants valued their roles and how they perceived they were valued by others. Self-value was rarely commented on explicitly, but could sometimes be deduced from the way in which people spoke about their roles, for example expressing pride in what they did or had achieved. In addition to comments about the term ‘professional services’ as mentioned above, lack of appropriate reward and recognition was mentioned, one participant noting that the uncertainty related to the fact that the lack of clear promotion routes for academic staff in relation to learning and teaching existed to an even greater extent for professional services staff, which impacted on how far they could be seen as professional. For staff who had non-traditional roles, this was seen as another reason for uncertainty, as one participant commented when asked if they saw themselves as a professional:

‘... it’s a sort of a strange paradox isn’t it, you know, if I worked in a library then I could probably say that more clearly; because I’m working directly with students I don’t though’ (IP1).

Another commented that while she saw herself as professional she did not ‘voice’ this view and did not see herself as part of a ‘collective’.

For participants who had previously held academic roles, there was some uncertainty as to whether they viewed themselves as positively as members of professional services as they had previously, as exemplified by this comment:

‘I’m still thinking is this the right position because I could have done much, I mean better in terms of publishing ... and pursuing my own goals but I think just realising that we’re a service...’ (IP3).

One of these participants commented that when she first took up her post in professional services it was her view that academic staff were more professional because her values aligned with their shared values, which she perceived to be lacking in professional services:

‘I was just really, really surprised ... and it just seemed all a bit slack really and so divorced from student learning’ (IP9).

In contrast, a manager in Library and Student Support felt that shared values bound her service team together while allowing for differences of opinion to be expressed. She considered that building the management team had been crucial in achieving this, as well as explicit work focussing on and questioning values with staff, using statistical data and service user comments to support this developmental activity. She had deliberately set out to foster a sense of shared values among the team, noting that developing strategic plans together had been helpful in this respect and that: ‘we’ve done a lot of questioning of our own values ... and what we’re trying to do’ (IP8). She also commented that this developmental work was particularly important when, as in her case, a manager inherited a weak management team and staff who had been in the institution for a long time.

5.2.13 Perceptions of being valued by the institution

There was little comment on institutional steer in relation to value. One manager considered that the university’s strategic framework and policies set faculties and

professional services in opposition when in reality they were ‘actively entwined’, although they operated in different ways. Another felt that there was ‘a huge stumbling block’ in the institution because of the lack of worth attached to professional services. Two participants commented that they did not feel valued by the institution, one of them adding that this might be because professional services staff were expected ‘to toe the line’.

5.2.14 Perceptions of being valued by academic staff

Perceptions of whether academic staff valued their services varied according to participants’ role. Comments were frequently hesitant or unsure, with views sometimes changing as the participants thought aloud on this issue. Staff with a predominantly quality assurance focussed role perceived that their work was not generally valued, one stating that apart from hard work being acknowledged value was ‘completely a no-no’. This was perceived to be partly because staff with this type of role were obliged to request that certain procedures be complied with, one commenting that:

‘... there’s a huge percentage that will feel that because they don’t do things in the way that they should that we get on their back and then there’s the small percentage left that might actually value what you do’ (IP10).

However, this participant also thought that the recent restructuring of the Academic Enhancement Unit had helped to break down some of the barriers to being valued, through the creation of officers who worked closely with faculty staff and who had both quality assurance and enhancement roles.

Another participant saw that their value fluctuated depending on which aspect of their role was predominant, again seeing requests for compliance as having a negative effect:

‘... you’re just the, sort of, the face of somebody else coming in and telling them they’ve got to do something differently’ (IP1).

This variation was also experienced by participants with a staff development role and by a participant who worked in a service where there had been a ‘stigma’, from academic staff’s perception, attached to one of the activities he supported. The need to work hard to demonstrate ‘proof’ of value was recognised as vital and seen by the same participant as being harder to achieve than in a commercial organisation. Lack of understanding of participants’ work was also seen as contributing to lack of value:

‘I would say there’s a huge percentage that don’t know what the team do because they are not programme leaders’ (IP10).

In contrast, staff whose role was related to academic or skills development and enhancement activities were more likely to find their support accepted or actively sought, as noted by one participant in relation to development needs analysis:

‘... which gets the buy-in from the staff so they don’t feel threatened, they don’t feel as though they are deficient, it is about something that’s going to be supportive’ (IP4).

Staff with a library-related role also thought the value of their service was understood and actively supported. One manager expressed the view that:

‘the collections, the liaison activities, the user education I think they see that quite clearly ... and I think they do value it and if there’s ever any threat ... to cutting the number of people or the books or whatever, they are up in arms and they do support us very well on that’ (IP6).

However, another manager commented that sometimes good NSS scores were claimed by faculty staff as being the result of their own efforts, whereas responsibility for poor scores would be transferred to Library and Support Services.

A frequent comment was that certain activities were valued, several participants noting that their work was appreciated when it was ‘definite’, visible in terms of outcomes or ‘proof’, for example with regard to projects or benefits to students, or where academic staff perceived it to be ‘proper work’. For some participants with a quality assurance role, the perception that participants were carrying out work that some academic staff considered to be ‘redundant’ affected feelings of role worth. Specialist knowledge and

skills were believed to be respected and one participant thought their professionalism was valued. Another considered that senior managers 'highly valued' their support. Outcomes that were recognised as 'academic', such as delivering conference papers, also contributed to service staff being valued. It was also noted by one participant that roles could not be valued by academic staff if they were not clarified for them:

'...yeah I think they do value me, I think, but because of the different roles I've had...it has been, you know, it has been a case I have to get out there and explain it to people...and then they get the value of it' (IP7).

Because of the importance of the outcomes rather than the process of support, participants saw that their value was often not perceived initially or sometimes until after completion of particular tasks when the 'helpful difference' they made was acknowledged.

One participant considered that their service team were considered as outsiders by the academic community. Others considered that they were initially viewed in this way but that, as expressed by one participant:

'Once people get on board and see what you are doing and realise that you are actually on the same team as opposed to trying to do something different that makes, has made such a difference' (IP5).

When asked what evidence they could offer as examples to support their perceptions of being valued, participants focussed on both actions and comments made. Positive evidence included being invited back into academic departments to provide more support, positive feedback, being thanked, being recommended to other staff or being acknowledged as an expert, emails or face to face thanks:

'... we survey academics ... [gap] ... they name people ... and they say X will always go the extra mile ... we know them really well, we know we can trust them, they did tremendous work with us ... on this or that ...so there's a lot of good feedback' (IP6).

Attempts by staff to respond to academic staff requests or to negative feedback were also noted as resulting in positive evaluation. One participant gave as an example the development of mutual trust and respect:

‘ ... one particular academic who in the past had been quite cagey invited me to her office so she could show me how she facilitated all of the vacancies and opportunities I was sending via email, how she was then spinning them and turning them around to put on to the Blackboard site so that they would appeal to her students and it was really interesting to see it from that perspective and very rewarding’ (IP5).

However, rudeness from academic staff was mentioned by several participants, as well as indicative behaviour:

‘ ... with one guy it was very definite body language and what he was saying, you know, when I was sort of talking to, he was quite sort of angry’ (IP1).

A participant who had previously worked in a faculty commented on the cross-community difference:

‘ ... people were really nice to each other ... I think maybe I mean mostly nice to each other, but people are much harder on the centre, much harder’ (IP9).

5.2.15 Perceptions of being valued by professional services staff

Participants commented that their perceived worth varied depending which professional service was making the evaluation, although some thought it was difficult to know whether their roles were valued or not, one commenting that there was a ‘hierarchy of knowledge’ in professional services with technical knowledge being valued above ‘the pedagogy element’ of the participant’s role. Several participants considered they were valued if they provided help to the service involved, rather than their work being valued in itself, or where specialist knowledge or skills were required. One participant felt that the whole team needed to be valued and not simply individuals within a team:

‘I want people not to see [*name*] she used to work in the Faculty, she’s quite good, you know, that’s the kind of the story, isn’t it? I want the story to be the [*team name*] ... you know, they deliver’ (IP9).

As with that of academic staff, professional services’ evaluation was thought to be higher where participants worked with, as opposed to for, the service involved. The role of the service director was noted as a factor in determining whether participants’ work was valued, and the relationship between individuals within different teams was commented on:

‘... sometimes across team working individually then, yes, we would very much value each other and I would take [*names*]. I think that’s, those are quite supportive ... at a certain level because we know intimately what each other does ... but not always ...’ (IP10)

Role overlap was also perceived to have an impact on value, one participant noting that it was ironic that their team had least contact with the professional service staff team where the overlap was most significant and that this was because there was no shared goal. Another commented that staff liked to look for distinctions and difference, which was unhelpful.

‘Tensions’ between services were also noted, due to the different nature of work carried out, one participant remarking that:

‘ the Computing people don’t like the way we work because we try to be inventive and they want us to work in a box’ (IP8).

The tendency to allocate blame to another service rather than to working collaboratively to find solutions to problems was also mentioned as having a negative impact on value.

Evidence of positive evaluation included being invited to contribute to work being led by another professional service, being ‘kept in the loop’ by a service or asked to contribute an opinion, and being acknowledged as a quality ‘gatekeeper’.

The view of the HR director was that the lack of shared understanding of the work carried out by professional services was problematic:

‘I think the other thing is about Professional Services understanding each other ... not just that divide between ... the academic areas ... and Professional Services ... it’s actually what level of understanding do we, within the Professional Services, have with what each other do ... so that understanding needs to permeate that’ (IP13).

She believed that professional service alliances were formed by chance rather than design and that cross-group working on particular tasks was the best way to achieve a sense of community.

5.3. Findings from institutional documentation

5.3.1 The institutional presentation of professional services in general

The university’s public-facing institution level documents and website made limited mention of its professional services. The printed and website undergraduate prospectus in place in November 2011 included a reference on the front page to the Library team being shortlisted for a *THE* award. However, a reference to ‘experienced staff’ in relation to provision of support for students was the only description of professional services staff’s qualities, whereas two pages were devoted to the calibre of academic staff. Departmental webpages were openly accessible, allowing for a service’s own view of its role and calibre to be presented, but in some cases this required a user’s understanding of where services might be located in order to navigate to the appropriate page.

Documents produced for staff such as the Staff Handbook, and institution policy documents relating to staff did not differentiate between academic and professional services staff but referred throughout to ‘staff’. The then current Human Resources Strategy (2008) was not publicised but was made available to me on request. This document included as one of five key strategic aims: ‘To develop new ways of working by new role perceptions and practices’ and included as one of four broad themes

identified to deliver the key aims: ‘Staff Development for Learning and Teaching’. Descriptions of projects carried out to support the strategy mentioned work carried out by professional services staff relating to learning and teaching, such as professional development and web-supported learning. The latter was described as having ‘made a major contribution’ to the institution’s achievement of its strategic aims. In general, the strategy did not differentiate between groups of staff, although mention was made of targeted staff development. Mention was also made of the implemented Higher Education Role Analysis (HERA) job analysis scheme which ‘rates all jobs on the same criteria’ and the development of a single pay and grading structure.

A new strategy was under development at the time the research was being carried out. Work with a regional group of Human Resources staff was also underway to develop descriptions of the university’s expectations in relation to both academic and professional services staff.

5.3.2 The presentation of professional services staff in relation to the governance of learning and teaching

The membership of the overarching learning and teaching related committee at the time the research was being carried out consisted of senior academic and professional services staff. The sub-groups reflected this mix, normally with a higher proportion of academic staff, depending on the work of the group.

The proposal document (2011) relating to the restructuring of the learning and teaching related committees highlighted the quality enhancement of the student learning experience as a key function of the committees. The development and consultation process for the restructuring involved both senior academic and professional services staff. In addition to setting out the areas the committees’ work should cover, the proposal made reference to joint working between academic and professional services staff, commenting on the ‘opportunity for the enhancement team to share with deans and committee chairs university priorities and sector requirements derived from external drives and internal strategic activity’.

It also referred to the committee's role in monitoring 'non-academic process quality', in other words the quality of the work of the professional services teams who would present annual plans 'in response to measured and reported performance data, student feedback, and service team and faculty commentaries within NSS and annual quality monitoring'.

The structure, membership and remit of the committees indicated an intention to enable professional services staff, other than those who attended in a purely secretarial role, to participate in the strategic and operational oversight of learning and teaching.

5.3.3 The presentation of support staff in Faculties

Faculty websites did not have a standard way of providing information about their staff located in their Faculties. Similarly, within Faculties, Schools also differed in the way they presented this information. Two main ways of providing information were generally used. The first was to list all staff with their post titles and contact details, and the second was to list them according to staff grouping, for example, 'academic', 'technical' or 'administrative'. Post titles were similar to those found in the professional services, such as 'co-ordinator', 'officer', and 'administrator'. A number of staff also had a post title which consisted of or included the work 'technician'. In some Faculties or Schools, staff profiles or CVs were provided for academic staff but, with the exception of one Faculty which provided this information about some of its technicians, there were no staff profiles for other groups of staff. One Faculty provided a page detailing the services provided by the quality support staff and one School mentioned learning support services in its information for students. One School made no mention of support staff.

5.3.4 Professional services with a learning and teaching support remit

The two main service teams whose work relates directly to learning and teaching support are the Academic Enhancement Unit and Library and Student Support. Both of these services have undergone restructuring in the last two years.

Documentation relating to the first service provides evidence of the institutional view of their broad roles. Their objectives are summarised in a document relating to proposals for restructuring quality support staffing (2011) as being ‘crucially about supporting lecturers to deliver excellent learning experiences’. Their role is also described as being to support the university’s senior management team in determining the priorities relating to learning and teaching by evaluation of ‘sector policy, internal and external data sets and the generation of university strategies for quality assurance, teaching enhancement, assessment and staff development’. The briefing document for the new director of the service (2011) comments positively on their senior staff’s ‘excellent leadership skills, expert knowledge’, which are seen as valuable for the university.

Documents relating to the work of teams within the service before its restructure in 2011, such as the former ‘Learning Development Staffing Structure’ (undated), state that ‘key strategic deliverables’, driven by the University’s strategic plan and external requirements, shape the service provision. While also indicating the more specific areas of this provision, including curriculum design, assessment and feedback, technology-enhanced learning, and staff development, repeated reference is made to support for strategic development, for example through environmental scanning, briefing papers for senior management, and ‘investigations to inform development of policy and strategy’.

This document also sets out the roles of both senior staff and ‘officer level’ postholders, the former emphasising the strategic aspects of their work. Officer roles make more mention of advice, support and ‘embedding’ activities and systems administration, but also mention the expectation of leading roles in certain areas, such as learner support. The work of a curriculum team, which used to be a smaller team within the learning development team, provides further details of the work expected which includes both

strategic and operational activities. Mention is made of the need to 'lead', 'support', 'manage', 'co-ordinate' 'advise', 'disseminate' and 'present.'

Similarly, a document (undated) proposing the centralising of quality management functions sets out the activities expected of the head of quality, the senior officers and the assistant quality officers. The wording in this document also focuses on the strategic role of the senior staff and officer roles such as 'advising staff', 'underpinning management of committees', supporting Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies' requirements, training participants in following processes, and writing quality manuals. Assistant quality officer roles include such examples as supporting internal preparation for validation and review, assembling and dispatching documents, maintaining data records, website and events database, and budgetary payments across quality processes, and supporting Faculty level committees.

5.3.5 Job descriptions

Job descriptions include the areas of postholders' responsibility and related person specifications. The grading of all posts is confirmed by Human Resources in line with the university grade structure, which in turn reflects the national structure.

Most of the job descriptions of all Academic Enhancement Service staff were written or edited by the PVC to whom the service reported, as part of the restructuring process. They emphasise the importance of team working and, in some cases, networking, and the need to work in a proactive way. Job descriptions for senior staff in the service mention the provision of advice and support for the PVC, and leadership and management of strategic development work in order to promote 'student success, achievement and retention'. Leadership on institutional research and evaluation into assessing and enhancing the quality of the student experience' and on the development and implementation of projects and initiatives' are also mentioned.

In terms of the skills required for the senior posts, facilitation and teaching skills are mentioned 'to underpin staff development activities' and research skills 'to inform and enhance practice across the University'. The person specifications for the Director's post (2011) have as an overarching requirement 'commitment to empowerment of colleagues'. Out of eight essential 'skills and abilities' requirements, five relate to skills needed to work effectively with other people. Membership of appropriate professional body or bodies is included in the 'desirable' section, as are a teaching qualification and 'lecturing' experience.

The job descriptions of staff holding non-senior posts are, as might be expected, more concerned with responsibilities relating to quality processes and protocols. However, the development of a 'community of good practice' and working within a 'consultative framework' for quality assurance and enhancement processes, and the need to act as a resource for academic colleagues on strategic developments, are included in responsibilities for some posts at grades 7 and above. Some posts include dissemination of good practice relating to learning and teaching in the lists of responsibilities. In some areas of quality assurance, middle grade postholders are expected to 'lead' and 'organise'. In the Staff Development team, postholders are expected to focus on 'development of new skills' and 'new ways of thinking and working' for 'all staff', and to support the University 'change agenda' as well as 'embedding the core behavioural values'.

Person specifications for 'officers' include the need for graduate level qualifications, with HND level being the requirement for 'assistant' level posts. Administrative skills, including the ability to work accurately and methodically are also requirements. However, the director of HR, who did not have a degree, expressed a very different view:

'... all my HR aides are CIPD qualified ... I don't insist they're graduates ... I'm not interested in their degree ... but I am interested in that they have a professional qualification because the only way to build a client partnership approach is for people to have professional credibility ... and I think that's really acute in higher education' (IP13).

She added that she saw the ‘notion of professional qualification versus graduate status’ as a key challenge for higher education institutions, partly because of persisting ‘academic snobbery’ and that it was essential for professional services staff to have ‘professional standing within your own professional body’. In her view, a degree was no more than a starting point and she expressed interest in those institutions which ‘mould’ their staff. With specific regard to services supporting learning and teaching, she considered that ‘recruiting for attitude’ was more important than qualifications. She also considered, in relation to both service managers and their staff, that :
‘... in their own right they are qualified ... and qualified to a similar ... level ... as those people on the academic side’.

She held the view that ‘a set of competencies’ should be the main requirement, together with a ‘professional standard’, but did not specify how this would be assessed.

5.3.6 Library and Student Support

The service’s stated overarching aim is ‘to support and enhance teaching, learning, research and the student experience’ which it operationalises through Library, Computing and Student Administration services which are delivered through three Learning Resource Centres, and online.

The service’s website included mention of the fact that staff development and the development of values were strategic objectives for 2009-10. It also stated that it adds value by ‘encouraging our staff to use their professional and technical skills’ and by developing ‘staff expertise. It emphasised partnership working and provide a link to the services values and behaviours.

5.3.7 Other professional services

Other services which have a remit including learning and teaching related activities are the Graduate Development Centre , Student Recruitment and Widening Access, and Student Advice and Wellbeing. The latter two provided no information about their staff on their webpages.

The Graduate Development Centre's website (2011) provided a general statement about its staff but no specific details, mentioning that users could expect its staff to be 'welcoming, courteous and approachable as well as professional and appropriately qualified'. Its Statement of Service goals stated that it aims to 'value, communicate with, and encourage the development of, each member of staff in order to maintain a high quality service' and that it would 'participate in and support appropriately the work of the relevant professional organisations'. It also mentioned the Centre's values which include the maintenance of a 'professional atmosphere'.

5.3.8 Commentary

The documentation considered has been produced by different staff teams for a variety of purposes, ranging from PR and marketing material aimed at prospective students and other interested parties to various types of information for members of staff. There is, therefore, no coherent framework for these documents, although the strategic aims of the institution provide an underlying theme, and thus a link, for many of them.

The institutional-level documents suggest, although this is not frequently made explicit, an aim of promoting a cohesive view of staff. There are few references to sub-divisions of staff in either strategic or policy documents, although promotional materials tend to highlight academic staff roles. Documents relating to the committee structure also show that both academic and professional services' staff participate in the governance of

learning and teaching. However, it is difficult to find examples in the documentation of how the strategic aim of developing 'new role perceptions and practices' has been met, other than the report on the Staff Development for Learning and Teaching projects in the Human Resources Strategy, which states that one reason staff undertake continuous professional development events is to receive support 'in their work role (or changing work role)' (p.4). The projects report on skills development, which partly meets the aim of supporting new practices, although this is qualified by lack of staff participation in some cases. Reports against Change Management and Implementation, with the exception of development for the institution's senior management, also focus on skills and 'behaviours'.

At Faculty and School level, the presentation of staff varies but generally focusses on academics, with limited mention of support staff. It is therefore difficult to ascertain from the documentation what perceptions exist in relation to professional services roles. The absence of mention suggests lack of perceived importance of the services in relation to the work of the Faculties.

The professional services' own presentation of their role and identity in relation to learning and teaching also varies according to the service. There is no shared view of the role of the services, other than the provision of support for learning and teaching, nor of expected behaviours.

The findings from the documentation provided a parallel view to those from the survey and the interviews. Taken together, the three data sets supplied 'rich' data for analysis.

Chapter Six: Analysis and discussion of the findings

In considering the findings, I began by returning to my research questions relating to how role and identity are perceived by the staff researched. Social identity theories emphasise that identity is a complex and contested concept; the findings reflect this view, and also indicate that the perceptions of the participants were formed within a changing and sometimes difficult environment. The findings also revealed a number of issues related to the perceptions of identity, some of which I had anticipated but others which were unexpected.

The themes which emerge are interlinked. Two major and connected themes are complexity and uncertainty, which underpin a considerable number of the comments made by participants about role and identity. These will be considered in relation to other aspects as these are discussed.

6.1. Professional identity

Professional identity is not a focus of interest in the institution, although some participants displayed an awareness of the concept. While I had not expected it to be the subject of considerable discussion, I had anticipated that it would feature in relation to role, professionalism and staff development. A confused sense of professional identity comes to light from participants' responses. Since aspects of recent literature discussed in Chapter Three, (Kidd, 2000; Whitchurch, 2004, 2007), suggest that identity is plural, even fragmented, this might be expected. A number of themes arise in relation to the expressed perceptions of identity, particularly professional identity.

6.1.1 Perceptions of profession and professionalism and their impact on identity

With the exception of those participants who worked in Library and Student Support, no strong sense of the concepts of profession and professionalism emerges from

participants' comments. However, those views that were expressed showed that participants associate the concepts with some of the definitions and attributes referred to in the review of literature in Chapter Three (Becker,1970; Johnson,1972; Corral and Lester, 1996).

Professionalism is clearly associated with specialist knowledge, one participant articulating the views of most participants of such knowledge being crucially related to professionalism, although not easy to define: 'I guess something that requires bespoke knowledge of, I don't know, of a professional nature I suppose' (IP2). 'Academic' and 'specialist' knowledge are the attributes of professionalism most frequently and confidently identified by participants and understandably therefore the ones they claimed for their own roles. Participants who referred to academic knowledge generally meant the knowledge which they considered their qualifications, specifically their degrees, evidenced. They saw their academic knowledge as the more important, given the context in which they worked, even if their role did not require them to provide 'academic' support. Some participants considered their academic qualifications gave them a certain status, being appropriate to a higher education environment, possibly because they perceived that academic knowledge was valued and considered essential by their academic colleagues. There is a mismatch here with the views expressed by the director of Human Resources, who saw specialist knowledge as more important for professional services staff. Institutional documentation and websites made no reference to qualifications with the exception of job descriptions, which usually stated the requirements in terms of academic qualifications only.

References to specialist knowledge, when detailed by interview participants, often described knowledge or skills that would not generally be described as specialist, although 'technical' knowledge, referring to in-depth IT related knowledge, and 'commercial' knowledge may be exceptions. Job descriptions rarely required more than 'experience', which was not specified in detail, in certain fields. These findings suggest that professional services staff supporting learning and teaching in the institution are not well able to differentiate between generalist and specialist knowledge and that they are, with the exception of the library staff, unable or unlikely to articulate what their

specialist knowledge consisted of. However, I consider that their perceptions of their own knowledge and skills contribute to their sense of identity in two important ways. The possession of 'academic' knowledge enables participants to identify with the institution's dominant knowledge discourse, even if they did not articulate this, and holding 'specialist' knowledge, however defined, provides an element of status and also confidence.

The findings also suggest that some participants were unaware of bodies of knowledge relating to their role since they either described their knowledge as specialist knowledge, which was not always the case, or did not mention a need for specialist knowledge. I consider that this is likely to affect both the way they are viewed by their academic colleagues and how they view themselves in terms of professional status.

In terms of a research-based body of knowledge, very few participants are involved in research and there were only rare mentions made of research informing their practice. The documents considered also show that there is no expectation that professional services staff will be involved in research activity. However, references were made to more informal research, such as carrying out a survey and summarising the outcomes, as examples of increasing personal or institutional knowledge. Having such knowledge is also seen as something which is valued by academic staff. Despite this, only one participant mentioned published research in their field informing practice or contributing to professional development. Overall then, there is no strong sense of the importance of research-based or research-informed practice in relation to professionalism. In a university context, this again may impact on how far staff members are seen to be part of a 'professional' service by academic colleagues, or on the other hand, it can be seen as an indication that this is not an activity considered appropriate for professional staff to undertake because it enters the academic domain.

Participants also saw development and training as important aspects of professionalism. However, they did not generally have a clear view as to what this consisted of, or might consist of, in terms of professionalism, despite the fact that it was frequently referred to. 'Professional development' was used to describe any type of development activity, possibly because of the frequent use of the term 'continuous professional development'

by the university for a wide range of development and training opportunities offered to both academic and professional services staff. There is little evidence of any deliberate focus on profession and professionalism in the development offered to the participants, with the exception of one library-based manager who includes it as part of team development. However, there is some awareness of professional development offered through external bodies and organisations such as the Quality Assurance Agency, the Higher Education Academy and the Staff Educational Development Association, which meet some of the needs of different groups of staff in terms of knowledge and skills enhancement, as well as providing networking opportunities.

In terms of the attributes commonly associated with the concept of profession then, there are mixed perceptions relating to three significant ones namely knowledge, qualifications, and professional training and development. In particular, no sense of a shared understanding of these emerges from the findings. This would suggest that profession is a concept that is not frequently discussed and on which there is no formal focus, despite its being embedded in the term used to describe the group of staff in which the participants are located. Given that over half of the survey respondents stated that 'staff development' was part of their role, a shared body of knowledge might be expected, although the tendency of staff to work within their teams may partly explain why this is not the case. However, for library staff, for whom these attributes are highlighted and recognised as being significant, the concept of profession is more strongly associated with their role and is more likely to be recognised and valued by the staff themselves and by their academic colleagues.

Altruistic motives, which are viewed as an attribute of professionalism by some writers, were given in relation to taking a post in learning and teaching services by nearly half of the survey respondents and were also mentioned by some interview participants as a reason for choosing their current or original post. However, they were not referred to by participants in connection with professional identity which suggests they do not associate the two. The fact that a large number of interview participants said they had not deliberately chosen learning and teaching support, although some may have chosen

university administration, also suggests they do not identify strongly with it in terms of profession.

There was a desire expressed by some of the participants to be seen as ‘professional’ and an understanding that this had to be evidenced, although behaviours were the most frequently mentioned example attributes. This reflects the views of writers such as Day (1999) and Boyt *et al* (2001) referred to in Chapter Three and is exemplified in the professional associations’ literature. However, only one reference was made to professional standards and it is perhaps the lack of awareness of these among this group of staff, again excluding librarians, that makes it difficult for staff to evidence their professionalism. There was no mention of any consistent benchmarking, either between professional services within the institution or with colleagues in other universities. Some of the staff with quality assurance roles mentioned the networks they belonged to but these do not emerge as significant in terms of professional identity.

While participants are aware of and frequently referred to the changes that had occurred in higher education, few see a relationship between these changes and the impact they have had on professionalism. Again, there were very few mentions of any focus or discussion about this within the services, the library-based manager referred to above being one of two exceptions, although some other managers showed an awareness of how their services had been affected. The second exception was a participant from Library and Student Support who commented on the increase in the use of technology in higher education and how that had weakened the previously specialist knowledge of staff in that area, a view which echoes some of Wilson and Halpin’s (2006) findings:

‘ That has just been a complete sea change... and so it’s been a kind of shrinking profession and a kind of question over whether people really need qualified librarians is a big, big issue for our profession as a whole’ (IP6).

There was no reference made to ‘new professionalism’ by any participant, which suggests that the learning and support staff teams within in the institution have little awareness of this concept. While I did not expect this to be otherwise, I thought it possible that some of the ideas associated with the concept would emerge from the findings, particularly given that Gornall (1999) and Conway (2000) both comment that

‘new professionals’ are particularly associated with learning and teaching related posts. However, with the exception of one participant, whose post related to the development of students’ employability skills, this was not the case.

The findings indicate that professional identity may be an aspiration for some learning and teaching support staff but is not embedded, except in the case of library staff, who are, however, experiencing professional identity changes. While the advantages of professional status are understood by some participants, there is no evidence of a deliberate attempt by staff, as described by Hoyle (1975) for example, to develop a discourse of professionalism as a means of raising status or reward. However, the findings suggest there is an institutional desire to develop such a discourse, although for different reasons.

6.2. Identity formation

My second research question related to how perceptions of role and identity were constructed. The findings indicate that the institution has taken some initial steps to promote professionalism but that this has not had a significant impact on identity. Analysis of the findings in relation to identity formation provide some interesting perspectives on what may have informed the perceptions expressed.

6.2.1 The institutional presentation of learning and teaching support staff

Weak professional identity may in part be linked to the mismatch between the institution’s stated mission in terms of its staff and the way in which learning and teaching support staff are presented in printed and web publicity, such as prospectuses and faculty and departmental web pages. While the mission statement refers to ‘mutual trust and respect’ and staff working ‘as one team’, this is not the perception of the survey respondents and interview participants who described experiences which gave a contrary picture, nor was it borne out by other documents in the public domain. This

may reflect the lack of a coherent framework for institutional documents and the website because they have been developed by different people for a range of purposes.

Since the faculties were not required to design and write their webpages in a consistent way, provided that the corporate style guidelines were followed, the mission and aims relating to staff were diluted and, as the findings showed, this sometimes results in references to learning and teaching support staff being either very brief or omitted completely, suggesting that the knowledge and skills of these staff members are not valued or considered worth mentioning. While the professional services webpages provide the opportunity to describe the aims and values of support staff working in 'central' teams, a similar lack of consistency is evident and the portrayal of professional identity is therefore dependent on the awareness of individual service directors in relation to this issue. This may have contributed to the participants' perceptions that their roles are poorly understood, and in some cases unappreciated, by academic colleagues. The lack of clear and consistent descriptions relating to participants and their work, combined with their own acknowledged difficulties in describing their roles, suggests that there are no deliberate institutional actions taken to clarify roles, which might support the formation of identity.

6.2.2 Post titles and job descriptions

The proliferation of and lack of consistency in post titles may also affect participants' sense of professional identity. As has been mentioned in Chapters Two and Three, (Gornall, 1999; Cour, 2001; Whitchurch, 2006) this is an issue in the wider sector and the titles may reflect the institution's own uncertainty as to what the posts involved, or a lack of recognition that titles have a role to play in supporting identity formation. Since the findings showed that participants struggle to explain their roles, this suggests that the range and variation of titles does not help to foster a common understanding of roles. This is discussed further below in relation to learning and teaching support posts.

Similarly, the findings indicate that job descriptions play a minimal part in supporting identity formation. While this may be partly because other methods are used to ensure

postholders understand their roles, the difficulties in describing roles which emerge from the findings suggest that the impact of these approaches is inconsistent. It is also probable that there is an institutional expectation that staff will be able to develop their roles without a reliance on job descriptions. Since a level of autonomy is a broadly recognised attribute of professionalism this may well be a reasonable assumption, at least for more senior staff. However, the findings show that while some staff have this capacity, others find the lack of clarity a source of anxiety and stress, and participants did not mention other ways in which the capacity is developed.

6.2.3 Practices relating to recruitment, induction and development of staff

Although the director of Human Resources expressed clear views on the importance of professional qualifications for support staff, these views have not informed the recruitment and promotion of learning and teaching support staff. The data shows that very few survey respondents, other than those holding professional librarian qualifications, have, or have been required to have, any specialist or professional qualifications for the posts they have been recruited or promoted to. The emphasis on academic qualifications in post specifications and the fact that interview participants see this as appropriate suggest that, understandably, academic knowledge and skills hold predominant value in the institution. This is increased by the fact that, as mentioned above, the majority of participants are unsure about what constitutes specialist knowledge and skills, and are therefore unlikely to be able to recognise their value, much less give an account of them to others. Since participants' references to post specifications mentioned the general, rather than specialist, skills that they thought had been required, the institution does not appear to demand specialist skills for the majority of the posts supporting learning and teaching, which also weakens its stated aims relating to professional services staff. I consider that this lack of focus on specialist knowledge, qualifications and skills has a significant impact on the professional identity of learning and teaching support staff, and this is borne out by the stronger sense of identity expressed by the staff working in the libraries, who had a clearer idea of the specialist skills and qualifications required for their roles.

The findings also indicate that induction has played little part in the formation of identity for this group of staff. For example, there are no induction documents or procedures aimed specifically at professional services staff. Similarly, while HR policy documents state that professional development is a priority, the planning and delivery of staff development does not reflect this focus. Interview participants' inconsistent experience of staff development, with only managers showing an understanding of the relationship between this and professional identity, is another factor. Since a number of participants' own roles include the planning and delivery of staff development, this in turn suggests the lack of a coherent strategy and approach. However, the recognition of the generous provision of development opportunities, and of the impact of staff development on improved ability to carry out roles through extending and deepening knowledge and skills, indicates that staff development does have a role to play, in particular with regard to increasing staff confidence in being able to describe their roles. While learning and teaching focussed development opportunities are appreciated, particularly with regard to reducing gaps in knowledge, they are not numerous or extensive enough to help to develop a more focussed professional identity.

Overall, the institution's approach to the recruitment, induction and development of professional services staff does not actively support the formation of professional identity, although it should be added that no claims are made by the institution in this respect. While it could be argued that similar recruitment and induction procedures are in place for academic staff in the institution, the lack of a strong sense of community for professional services staff, which is discussed below (6.4.5), may help to explain why the impact is significant for the group studied. Haslam (2003) has noted that the treatment of staff by those in authority communicates information about their self-worth, which highlights the importance of both written information and staffing practices in supporting identity.

6.2.4 Professional services and identity

The findings show a lack of clarity and consistency in relation to the concept of ‘professional services’. The director of Human Resources stated that the first time professional services were considered was at institutional ‘incorporation’ (as a polytechnic) in 1989, prior to which there had only been ‘administrative processing departments’ (IP13). However, these early professional services were not academic related. Documents available in 2011 relating to institutional mission and the restructuring of the Academic Enhancement Unit show that there was an intention to develop the professional services and their work, particularly quality support staff, with a view to their being better able to support strategic priorities, but there is less evidence of this being implemented. The term itself was interpreted with differing degrees of understanding and awareness by the interview participants. It was seen by some as conferring status while others perceived that it did not equate with being a member of a traditionally recognised profession, which indicates a variable impact on identity. As the institutional documents do not refer consistently to professional services staff but use a range of terms, this suggests that the term was introduced without defining it and without any deliberate steps being taken relating to its usage. As discussed above (Chapter 3.3), this situation is not unique to this institution.

The findings also suggest that opportunities for staff to meet colleagues in other services are limited to those occasions where they need to work or consult together. For example, respondents made no mention of cross-services training and development, or informal meetings; these may take place but have no recognised value in relation to professional identity. For some participants, the significant word was ‘services’, which was perceived in terms of providing support and advice, where ‘good’ service equates with being viewed as helpful or doing what was requested or expected, but no more. While a service ethos is seen by some participants as sufficient in itself, a more complex view was expressed by those staff who either hold a managerial post or whose roles require them to show initiative or take the lead.

The term ‘professional services’ was not perceived to have been in use for very long in the institution and participants aligned themselves with the team in which they are

located, such as quality support or staff development, rather than the broader service area. In terms of institutional structure, participants are placed in teams that cover a range of roles and responsibilities including, but not limited to, learning and teaching related support. There is therefore no reason for staff to identify with the concept of a wider professional services team and, with the exception of the managers, respondents' sense of identity and belonging is thus generally limited to the team to which they belong. Tajfel (1978) argues that being categorised does not lead to identification unless self-identification takes place. Being referred to, inconsistently, as 'professional services' has not had a significant impact on the self-identification of the participants. Haslam *et al* (2003) have noted that people do not want to associate themselves with a group that is perceived to have low status and this may hold true for the participants in this study.

Since there is no institutional guidance as to what being a member of 'professional services' might involve there is thus no reason for staff to reflect on or aim to develop a related or shared identity, beyond considering and perhaps aiming to conform to 'behaviours' promoted by the AUA, which not all participants were aware of.

These findings are borne out by research and writing relating to the sector as a whole. The 'fuzzy' nature of academic administration, as noted for example by Barnett (2003), and the limited recognition that the work of professional services staff covers far more than administration (Rhoades: 1996; Wild and Wooldridge: 2009) affect the understanding and views of academic and professional services staff. While identity formation in higher education institutions in general may be less conscious or deliberate than in other types of organisations, such as those which are more commercially oriented, the findings suggest that there is a link between the way in which identity formation is supported and the development of professional identity. In this respect, the institution exemplifies the view that has been expressed about the wider sector, as previously discussed, namely that academic identity has been the focus of attention as the changes in higher education over the last twenty to thirty years have impacted on academic staff and that the identity of other staff has attracted little attention, except where it has been seen as a threat to that of academics.

6.2.5 Motivation, career choice and career development

The varying motivations for taking up posts related to learning and teaching support suggest another relationship with a weak professional identity. Although the survey respondents had mostly made a decision to work in this area, they gave a range of reasons for their choice, as did the interview participants, who had not generally chosen a career in learning and teaching support. This lack of a unifying or shared motivation, while not necessarily problematic, may also be related to the absence of a strong sense of community, which in turns impacts on professional identity. The director of Human Resources' comments on the fact that many staff come into learning and teaching support through a 'general administrative' role suggest that it may be unrealistic to expect staff to have a strong sense of learning and teaching focussed identity. However, as discussed in section 2.4 above, no strong identity related to the wider professional services emerges from the data either.

Additionally, as a number of respondents have experienced post changes as a result of restructuring or have been in posts which 'morphed' into new ones, the lack of decisive choice and, in some cases, of a clear idea of what their new posts would entail makes it difficult for them to have a clear sense of professional identity. This comparative disempowerment emerges in the findings through expressions of uncertainty, confusion or even resentment in relation to role.

The lack of a clearly defined career structure also emerges as significant in terms of impact on identity. The perceived limits on the possibilities for staff who were not in an academic role, or who did not have 'academic' experience, and the services structure indicate that managerial posts were seen as providing the only possibility for a senior role in learning and teaching support.

6.2.6 Line managers

The importance of line managers in supporting the development of professional identity is recognised both by some of the respondents who have a managerial role and by those

staff who perceive that their managers have encouraged them to develop professionally. However, this support depends on the interest and understanding of individual managers in relation to professional identity, with the findings showing a range of both levels of understanding and active steps taken to support staff and to raise their awareness of the added value to the institution. Encouraging staff to join professional networks and to undertake professional development is shown to be a direct approach, but less formal, internal guidance relating to professional attributes, such as values, as evidenced by at least one manager, is also used to develop a sense of professionalism.

6.2.7 External influences

While external organisations, such as the AUA, were also recognised by participants as helping professional development, their emphasis on ‘behaviours’ suggests a limited impact on professional identity. The Higher Education Academy also provides some support for staff who support learning and teaching, although its work is aimed more at academic staff.

The lack of mention of academic and professional journals by participants suggests these have had minimal impact on identity. This may be because they are not read by the majority of participants, either because they are not aware of them or because they are not recognised as being relevant or helpful to their work or their professional development.

Informal professional networks were recognised as important by some managers but these did not appear to provide a strong support for professional identity formation.

6.2.8 The status and nature of learning and teaching in the institution

As mentioned in Chapter Two, research has a high status in comparison with learning and teaching within the institution. For example, at the time that the research was carried out only one member of the academic staff had obtained a professorial chair on the basis

of their teaching rather than their research outputs. I considered that this was likely to affect the support staff's perceptions of how their work was valued, and the interview findings partially confirm this, as exemplified by a manager in Library and Student Support stating that she would have preferred to see learning put before research in her post title, while her line manager stated that she would not mention learning and teaching if describing her post. However, the participants' belief in the importance of learning and teaching and, for some of them, their understanding of how their work contributes to this, mitigates against the lower status, at least in terms of self-value.

There is considerable variation in the way that the term 'learning and teaching support' is perceived. There is no written definition of the term in the institution, probably because it was not thought necessary to write one, although a number of documents make reference to the term and the self-selecting survey respondents saw this as at least part of their job. While the 2007-2012 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and some of the professional service teams' documentation provide some information, the findings indicate that line managers were the main source of guidance, which meant that this differed and therefore had a variable impact on identity, as mentioned above.

6.2.9 Changes in the higher education sector

As noted in Chapter Three, a considerable amount of discussion has taken place about the impact of government policy and wider changes such as the globalisation of higher education on academic identity (Taylor, 1999; McNay 2000; Good, 2001; Barnett, 2003, Trow, 2010). While survey and interview participants were not asked specifically about external factors, the findings suggest that the role and identity of learning and teaching support staff in the institution have also been affected by these developments.

A few participants made overt comments on external change and were aware that this might have prompted structural changes in the institution, such as the creation of the Academic Enhancement Unit, which were also taking place in other universities.

Participants also demonstrated an awareness of differences in structure between the

institution and others, where their own roles or teams were concerned. References to 'vogues' and changing expectations illustrate this awareness, although participants did not usually mention specific examples of external change. There was also an awareness that externally collected data, such as outcomes of the National Student Survey, had an impact on their practice.

One of the key external policies for learning and teaching which has been promoted through the Quality Assurance Agency is the 'enhancement' of learning and teaching, which refers to the steps taken by higher education institutions to offer learning opportunities to their students. The findings reflect the views of support staff in the sector who have written about these changes, as discussed in Chapter Three (Cour, 2000; Browne and Beetham 2010; Wilson and Halpin, 2006). 'Enhancement' was felt by the interview participants to have had both positive and negative outcomes in terms of role and identity. It was perceived to have led to the development of new or considerably changed roles, which some of the participants appreciated, but at the same time it was felt to have created a source of conflict and in some case uncertainty. One participant commented that she did not understand the term in relation to her role which had been changed to accommodate 'enhancement' as part of her work, which had previously been limited to 'assurance'.

The focus on the 'quality' of the students' learning experience is another area that the findings suggest has affected identity in both positive and negative ways, and is discussed further in relation to roles in the next section.

In summary, a wide range of factors can be seen to have influenced the formation of identity for this group of staff, some of which have had more impact than others. The findings suggest that the institution has aspirations to develop the learning and teaching support staff but that these have been only partially realised. Additionally, the perceptions of the interview participants suggest they have been largely passive recipients of this identity formation and that they have not been actively involved in discussion about such aspects as increased professionalism.

6.3. Roles and identity

The range and multiplicity of roles, the mixture of general and specialist skills required for some of them and the fact that some interview participants carry out work that both does and does not relate to learning and teaching all indicate a correlation between role and identity for this group of staff. For the interview participants, role and identity were closely linked, and identity was to a considerable extent defined for them by the roles they carried out. Roles generated a significant amount of strong feeling when discussed, even when associated with confusion, which highlights their importance to this group of staff.

The range of roles both survey respondents and interview participants mentioned also evidences the complex nature of identity. The role diagram (*fig. 2*) based on the roles identified in the preliminary survey and used as a prompt during the interviews shows that 'staff development' and 'educational development' are the two areas which have the largest number of associated roles. These broad areas were named with the terms used by the respondents and suggest that respondents were able to 'bundle' their roles under a heading which either reflected the name of the team in which they were located or had a unifying or summarising function. In contrast, the number and range of responsibilities, and the fact that many respondents also carry out work which had no obvious connection with learning and teaching support, help to illustrate interview participants' statements about their difficulties in explaining their roles to others. However, job descriptions for senior staff do mention the need for proactive and collaborative working skills, and in some cases for teaching skills, which suggests an institutional expectation that such staff will be able to articulate their roles. Nonetheless, this is a cause of some anxiety, as evidenced by the language used when discussing this issue. Role complexity is therefore a source of stress for some of the participant group.

The recognition that new roles were required which lay outside the traditional ones that respondents had previously held and the varying responses to this, from feelings of stress to a sense of liberation, also provide some insight into the uncertainty expressed in

relation to sense of identity. These changes were understood to have arisen from both external and internal requirements, such as the need to provide more support for the use of technologies to enhance learning and teaching. Most respondents were also aware that this had impacted not only on how they viewed themselves, but also how they were viewed by academic staff. The outcomes of research in the sector relating to professional services staff roles, as discussed in Chapter Three (Corrall and Lester, 1996; Whitchurch, 2008; Wild and Woodridge, 2009;) indicate that such changes have contributed to the level of criticism of managerialism, but have also proved to be liberating to those staff able to take advantage of the lack of definition. For the staff in this study, however, there was generally a desire for more specificity which suggests that they were unprepared to cope with the possibilities offered by a less defined post.

6.3.1 Post titles and impact on identity

As mentioned above, the number of different post titles held by survey respondents may also have contributed to uncertainty in relation to identity, especially as the majority of respondents believed that their post titles and job descriptions did not help to provide them or others with a clear idea of what their posts entailed. This is illustrated by the fact that only four respondents have titles which mention learning and teaching support, although this is a key or sole aspect of all the respondents' work. Since post titles in the institution are chosen by service directors but receive final approval by Human Resources, it is not clear whether the choices are deliberately broad to allow them to cover the range of roles or reflect the difficulty in encapsulating the duties and responsibilities of the posts. Similarly, those post titles which give no indication that they involve learning and teaching support might indicate a deliberate attempt to differentiate the post from an academic one, or simply a lack of consideration. The use of general terms such as 'co-ordinator' and 'officer' imply an administrative function, even though many respondents with these words in their titles are not primarily carrying out administrative work. The terms may have been chosen because they are thought to suggest 'professional' roles or because they are considered appropriate to the post grade on the salary scale. However, the use of such administration-related titles may partially

explain the view of increased bureaucracy and ‘managerialism’ in higher education. The findings align with those of Wilson and Halpin (1996) who found that library staff felt ‘their job titles did not adequately define their role and function’ (p. 86) and that new post titles undermined their skills and attributes and did not link to their professional identity.

As noted by one of the managers, the choice of titles is also political. Post titles are used to reflect or signal sectoral or institutional aims or focus, for internal or external purposes. However, the creation of new post titles which were perceived by participants to be poorly understood both within the institution and outside it, was also thought to have resulted in frustration in some cases. This situation is not unique to this case study, or to learning and teaching support roles. Shelley (2010), writing about research administrators, notes that: ‘Many titles were new job titles and this reflected the difficulty universities had in finding adequate terms to describe contemporary RMA identities, as well as the changing and evolving role profile of RMAs as they moved into areas requiring specialist knowledge and skills.’ (p.47) Shelley’s views are echoed by those of the respondents who perceived a need for a wider understanding of what learning and teaching support involves to be developed in the institution and, I would argue, the sector as a whole.

6.3.2 Staff development roles and identity

Although the roles diagram (*fig.2.*) shows some areas of work that would readily be identified as relating to learning and teaching support, others, such as ‘staff development’, can be considered as much wider in scope and likely to impact on the expectations of both those delivering and those receiving the support, and thus on identity. The large number of respondents referring to ‘staff development’ as part of their work reflects the growth in the range of roles carried out by learning and teaching support staff across the sector. Since this was the most frequently identified role in the survey (*Table 2*), the importance to participants of working relationships with both academic and other professional services staff, and of these staff valuing their work is

understandable. As discussed above, the relationship between their own development and professional identity was not frequently articulated by participants but ‘professional development’ was seen as important, valuable and valued. In general, this role therefore has a positive impact on identity.

6.3.3 Quality related roles and identity

One of the stated reasons for restructuring some of the learning and teaching support services into the Academic Enhancement Unit in 2011 was to ensure that quality assurance and enhancement were dealt with in a more holistic way. This was in line with guidance from the Quality Assurance Agency and interview participants’ comments showed they had understood the rationale. The quality team head noted that prior to restructure: ‘quality wasn’t perceived to be anything to do with learning and teaching’ (IP10), suggesting a positive impact of the new structure. However, as quality related work was also commented on as not always being associated with learning and teaching by academic staff, it is understandable that identity is not strongly identified with learning and teaching support by this group. Additionally, members of the group were not necessarily able to translate the rationale for the restructure into their daily practice or to communicate it to others. They still worked in the same sub-teams they had been in before the restructure and while some people saw that their roles were developing, others were not sure this was the case. Being given new post titles and being located in a new team has not had a noticeable effect on identity, although there is some evidence that this has had more impact than the concept of being part of professional services, as previously noted (p. 99, IP4).

The words used by participants with quality related roles were often expressive of emotion and suggest uncertainty about identity, in particular to how they are perceived and valued. Where staff referred to their roles being considered ‘irrelevant’ or ‘interfering’ by academic colleagues, their tone also indicated that such perceptions were profoundly felt. Participants with these roles were the least likely to express confidence about their role and the most likely to identify themselves with their main

work team. They were also the most likely to find the lack of clarity in their job descriptions problematic. They showed a strong and sensitive awareness of how they were perceived by others, and saw their need to require work to be carried out by others, particularly academic staff, as having a negative impact on how they were valued. In turn, this affects how they view themselves; participants from this group were particularly keen to be viewed as ‘professional’.

6.3.4 Technological enhancement of learning roles and identity

The increase in the use of learning technologies was perceived by participants to be an example of where academic staff within the institution are supported by learning and teaching professional services staff. Participants with these roles described themselves as having specialist skills and were more likely than other participants to believe their work was valued because it was ‘needed’ by academic staff or students. This view is borne out by studies referred to in Chapter Three (Corrall and Lester 1996; Wilson and Halpin 2006; Berman and Pitman 2010) which suggest that teaching and learning support which lies outside the traditional academic role but which is seen as directly relevant to student skills development is likely to be accepted.

6.3.5 Library related roles and identity

The participants with the clearest sense of identity were the staff who worked in Library and Student Support. These participants retain elements of a traditional librarian role and also have a role in the development of information skills, which they perceived as specialist. However, these participants also have a managerial role and their comments reflect that perspective. Since the role of library staff in supporting learning has grown comparatively slowly and is often linked with learning technology, as referred to by both survey and interview respondents, this also suggests why respondents who worked in this area had less difficulty in defining their roles and why they considered they were valued.

As discussed previously, this group has a stronger professional identity than the other participants; in the interviews they displayed more confidence and were less concerned as to how far they were valued by others, since they showed a well-developed sense of their own value. This group also works more with students than the other participants and draws some of their sense of identity from this. Student-facing work supports their service ethos but also provides a level of positive esteem which again makes them less concerned about how far they are valued by other staff. Although there is evidence that their professional identity is changing, as discussed above, they retain a clear sense of role direction and resilience in the face of changes in the sector. At the same time, they have a wider role than the support of learning and teaching, and this was expressed as an issue for some of them since it has introduced an element of conflict with their research support roles.

6.3.6 Academic practice roles and identity

Participants with roles supporting the development of academic practice carry out work involving the planning and delivery of initial professional development programmes such as the Post-Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, support for academic staff seeking different levels of accreditation through the HEA and support for the enhancement of learning and teaching, for example through organising the institution's learning and teaching conference and similar events. They also support pedagogic scholarship, for example through the editorship of the institution's pedagogic journal, and the enhancement of learning and teaching, including curriculum development, through a range of projects and individual or programme team level activities. This group shows both a strong awareness of the concept of identity and the widest variation in perceptions of identity, which may reflect both the range of their roles and the different routes by which they have come into their current posts. The group includes two people who formerly held academic roles and who still associated themselves in part with an academic identity. Among this group, there is an awareness of their relationship with academic staff and the tensions caused by possible role overlap.

Their perception of tension between academic and professional services staff is different from that expressed by quality support participants, but still strongly felt.

There was also an element of uncertainty and related anxiety expressed by all except the former academic with a managerial role with regard to purpose, identity and sense of value, largely because of the potential for conflict in relation to working with academic staff. For this team, roles involve work which is closer to that carried out by academic staff than is the case with other support teams, which may partly explain the higher level of anxiety.

6.3.7 Managerial roles and identity

As might have been anticipated, managers show the strongest sense of awareness of the concepts of identity and profession among the participants, although this does not emerge as a shared view. Where they see their managerial role as impacting on their identity, their comments suggested that they had reached these perceptions independently and there was no suggestion of a managerial group identity. They also demonstrated varying practices in terms of inculcating awareness of these concepts among their own teams. In general, although they were aware of tensions between themselves and their team members and academic staff they expressed less concern about this, tending to accept it and look for ways to work around it, rather than seeing it as a threat. However, as a group they also expressed a greater sense of regret in terms of what might pertain in terms of recognition and partnership working in comparison with the reality.

Again as might be expected, they showed that they understand how their work and that of their team aligns with the institution's aims and strategic direction, which provides a sense of purpose and security. Although the managers stated that they work together at times, there is no formal managers' group and no discourse emerges in relation to the management of learning and teaching support. This may be partly explained by the institutional structures and also by the different natures of the service teams.

6.3.8 Other roles and identity

One participant had a direct role in supporting employer engagement and a number of participants had roles which indirectly supported student employability, for example through the development of students' transferable skills. They showed an awareness that these are comparatively new roles and the participant with the employer engagement role had a very clear sense of what was involved and how it related to the student learning experience, while recognising that it was not well understood by others and therefore had to be 'sold'. The participant clearly saw this as being part of the post, rather than an issue of concern. The area was one which he considered had carried an 'internal stigma' and which he had therefore had to work hard to overcome and he now felt 'flattered' by the progress he had made in that regard, and excited by the interest shown by senior staff in what he was doing. Interestingly, this participant, whose background was in recruitment, was the most positive about his role and daily work, and the personal advantages provided by its flexibility and opportunities to access university facilities such as the library. His background also provided a different perspective from that of other participants, in that he recognised that 'outside in the commercial world ... a cultural change happens and you deal with it' (IP5), whereas in the higher education sector the changes were likely to take longer and require more discussion. This participant was the closest to the concept of the 'new professional', whose sense of profession lies outside the university and who sees their post as a step in their professional career. For example, he expressed no concern about the fact that his current post was fixed-term and that other ways to 'develop' would soon have to be considered. The director of Human Resources commented that moving from the private sector into a university tended to 'make or break' such staff because of the 'peculiarities' of the sector and the: 'bureaucracy ... committees and the infrastructure around HE' (IP13), which suggests that they need a high level of resilience in relation to identity.

Overall, the findings showed that role and identity were crucially linked for the participants. Since there were also a number of issues in relation to how newer and more

complex roles were understood and communicated, confusion and anxiety were also present for some staff. While the comparative freedom allowed by post titles and descriptions was liberating for those staff able to work creatively, others were clearly missing the security of more clearly defined terms to structure and explain their roles and help them to manage plural identities. While a wider participant sample might have produced more examples, only one participant had a role that could be viewed as that of a ‘new professional’.

6.4. Structures, relationships and identities

Universities, in common with other institutions, provide a structure in which staff carry out their work. The structure of the institution in the study is similar to that of other UK universities, being hierarchically organised and divided into academic and service departments. The findings indicated that this was worth considering in relation to identity since it was referenced by participants, as was restructuring, which had also had an impact on the staff concerned.

6.4.1 Institutional structure and identity

The document showing the university structure at the time the research was carried out (*fig.1*) shows the organisation of staff and the senior line management. As one of the managers interviewed noted, the division of staff into faculties and professional services places staff in separate groupings, which is the case in many other UK universities. Hellowell and Hancock (2001) comment that:

‘It has been widely accepted that the “new” UK universities, established in general from the former polytechnics, have managerial systems that are much more hierarchical in nature than the traditional collegial model’ (p. 185).

However, it is interesting to note that the line management structure which Bacon (2009) suggests encourages division between the two groups, namely professional services staff

reporting to a Registrar/Secretary while academic staff report to a Dean or PVC, was not in place in the institution at the time the research was carried out; professional services staff supporting learning and teaching reported to one of two senior academics, the PVC for Academic, Research and Regional Enhancement or the PVC for Student Experience. Despite this, the structure was seen to encourage division, with one participant commenting that it led to their team being viewed as ‘an external force’ (IP3). A manager commented that the way her team worked: ‘sounds like a faculty to me’ but also thought it was not so much the institutional structure which caused division but the strategy, policies and processes that: ‘set the faculties on one side of the business and the support or professional services on the other’ (IP8). The fact that funding for professional services is taken from learning and teaching income (HEFCE funding and direct fee income) probably contributes to this sense of opposition in some parts of the institution, particularly where the ‘added value’ of learning and teaching support is not appreciated.

The strong link between teams and identity which emerges from the findings may also be affected by the structure of professional services areas, where groups of staff with shared work, roles and purpose feel understood and recognised by their peers. This is most notable in those teams where there are tasks which most members carried out, such as the quality support team. The smaller group size, the importance of the line manager’s steer in many aspects of their work and development, which several participants referred to, and shared knowledge are also likely to be contributory factors. It is worth noting that no participants expressed dissatisfaction with their team or the team structure, but that several referred to team working or colleagues’ help, which suggests that teams provide a positive working experience which fosters team loyalty and identity. The fact that the smaller team units were not affected by the service restructuring probably reinforces this.

The restructuring of service teams into the Academic Enhancement Unit also involved the relocation of some quality support posts from the faculties into the new service. Respondents in those posts thus experienced a change from a faculty to a central role, which meant a change of loyalties and some feelings of alienation. I knew from their

line managers and from my own conversations with them that they had also experienced some negative feelings from their ex-colleagues about this change, and while these were not frequently commented on in the interviews, I considered this was likely to have had an effect on their perceptions about their roles and identity. The restructures that had taken place were referred to by participants in both the Academic Enhancement Unit and Library and Student Support as having affected how they viewed themselves. The restructure of the Academic Enhancement Unit was comparatively recent and some participants were hopeful that it would lead to positive changes in both working practice and relationships. There was also a desire among some of the more senior participants to have what one described as a 'more institutional role' (1P9), in other words to feel that they were not limited too closely to working solely within their team area. While recognition of the relationship between structure or restructure and identity was seldom expressed, there was a sense of aspiration associated with where participants found themselves within the structure and where they hoped to be.

6.4.2. Academic and professional services staff relationships

In general, the findings support the view expressed in a considerable amount of the writing about the identities of academic and professional services staff referred to in Chapter Three (Deem and Johnson, 2000; Kogan, 2000; Barnett, 2003; Brew, 2006), namely that the two staff groupings are frequently polarised. Participants expressed differing and sometimes strong feelings about this division, ranging from resigned acceptance to anger. Since participants with a quality focussed role made more frequent comments about not feeling valued and about their work being considered unnecessary or intrusive by academic staff, there is also a correlation with the views expressed in a number of articles referenced in Chapter Three about bureaucracy, 'managerialism' and attempts to limit academic autonomy (Trow, 1993; Deem, 1998; Taylor, 1999). The association of the quality support staff's work with 'compliance' for some academic colleagues probably contributes to this.

On the other hand, the fact that some participants felt positive about their relationship with academic staff indicates that the polarisation is not total. However, the need to evidence value, to negotiate role repeatedly and to persuade academic colleagues that role-related activities are necessary or desirable is an issue for some participants and again is associated with uncertainty about identity.

The findings also show that the participants wanted, and often actively tried, to bridge the gap, for example by trying to improve the service they provided or to demonstrate their value. When being seen as an ‘outsider’ or a ‘threat’ by academic colleagues was mentioned, a variety of recalled emotions were also expressed, such as surprise, for example because the relationship had changed, anger or confusion. These emotions had clearly acted as a spur to action for some participants who went on to explain what steps they had taken to try to ameliorate the situation. This suggests that emotions are particularly powerful where identity is threatened or weakened, perhaps particularly when it is not very strong in the first place. Similarly, the hesitancy and uncertainty that accompanied comments on perceptions of being valued suggest this affects self-confidence which in turn is likely to affect identity.

Whitchurch’s (2004) view that service staff experience ‘competing identities’ and that the interface where academic and specialist service staff meet may lead to both collaboration and competition is also borne out by the findings. The institutional documentation and some website material present an aspirational view of collaborative working at mission level and make reference to project work which is carried out jointly. Interview participants were keen to show how they tried to develop collaborative working relationships, and tended to see others, rather than themselves, as being resistant to this.

With regard to the relationship between learning and teaching support staff and other professional services, the structure is also perceived to lead to division rather than alliance. The Director of Human Resources commented that relationships were formed ‘by accident rather than design’ (IP13), which implies there is no focussed action taken in the institution to foster working relationships across the groups. However, she also considered that: ‘where people are required to work together ... in a very collegial and

co-operative way generally speaking ... they will' (IP13) where the needs of the business require it. Given the demands on the time of both groups of staff, partnership working and collaboration are only likely to take place where there is a need for it and when members from both groups bring the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to the task, crossing the notional boundaries to work together.

Boundaries appear from the findings to have a negative impact on identity in general. Further consideration of these findings was prompted by one of the research aims which involved exploring how far traditional boundaries were breaking down for learning and teaching support staff.

6.4.3 The 'blended' professional and 'third space'

My third research question related to the changes that have taken place in the sector and their impact on role and identity of learning and teaching support staff. When planning the research, I was particularly interested in discovering whether 'blended' professionals, as described by Whitchurch (2008), are emerging in the institution and whether hybridity, as defined by Bhabha (1990, 1994), where difference can be 'straddled' and negotiated, is enabling learning and teaching support staff to develop their own 'third space'. Since a number of participants hold managerial posts and since some hold 'quasi-academic' posts, my expectation was that this would be the case.

However, the findings show that the majority of participants fit into the category defined by Whitchurch as 'bounded professionals' (2008), being located in fixed structure teams with little cross-team working, even though their job descriptions do not necessarily provide them with the level of certainty that some of them would prefer. While some of the managers can be seen as working across boundaries, there is a lack at senior level of 'unbounded professionals', who find cross-institutional project working comfortable, and 'blended professionals', whose posts cross academic and professional domains, and who Whitchurch identifies as those most likely to be working between boundaries in 'third space'. In considering these findings, a number of related findings may be worth considering.

The first is that the overall institutional structure of faculties and professional services is not spanned by any posts at either managerial or lower levels among the respondents. Although many did not have had a clear conceptual view of what being part of professional services meant, staff were clear that they were located in central service teams which separated them from the faculties. Similarly, while some non-managerial staff described the opportunities they had to work with academics, they invariably described a service role in such work. When describing their roles, staff did not mention opportunities to lead or play an equal role in institution-wide projects, although project work was mentioned as a positive aspect by several participants. This allowed them to work with academic and other professional services staff on learning and teaching related developments, with one participant commenting that this impacted on her identity, enabling her to feel 'more of a wider University person' (IP3). However, as mentioned above (6.3.7), there are opportunities, and even requirements, for more senior staff in the relevant service areas to carry out such work, although the findings suggest they are not recognised as significant by the participants. This is also the case with committee work, which was rarely mentioned by the managers who have full membership of some institutional level committees or are 'in attendance' at others.

A second factor relates to the way in which staff work. Whitchurch (2008) comments on the importance of partnership working between academic and professional services staff; some participants recognised the need for this and described varying degrees of success in achieving it. However, there is little sense of boundaries being broken down and it becoming easier for staff to cross those boundaries. Although two participants had made the transition from academic to service posts, one was adamant that she and her former academic colleagues saw this as a one-way journey and the other commented wistfully on what she had lost in making the move. Participants' comments also indicated that they felt restrained by expectations, sometimes related to behaviours, which their posts involved. This was demonstrated by comments relating to the need to provide what academic staff expected, as opposed to having a role in shaping those expectations. Similarly, although participants commented on working in liaison with academic staff, roles described included 'facilitating', 'coaching' and 'developing', and the 'customer service' focus noted by one manager. While these can be seen as a key aspect of

‘support’, they suggest a limited view of professional services work which constrains identity.

Another possible cause for the lack of ‘third space’ working relates to shared values and acceptance. As with some of the other findings, there are variable and sometime contrary data. Since many participants referred to initiating contact with academic staff for liaison purposes and some participants mentioned enjoyment of working with academic staff as being a factor in choosing their career, the divide is not perceived as an impossible one to bridge. However, this emerges as a contested area where a struggle to find and establish role and identity is continually taking place. As mentioned in the sections of roles and identity above, while a few participants thought their roles were accepted, the comments made by others suggest that a frequently repeated challenge is occurring in relation to what is acceptable work for them to carry out. The responses suggest that this is because discussions have to be carried out between individual staff members, sometimes more than once in each case. This could be in part because academic staff consider that their own roles are being threatened, or it might indicate that attempts to negotiate ‘third space’ are being made, but are perceived as attacks rather than as negotiations. The recognition of some managers that one of their responsibilities is to pre-empt the need for their staff to defend their activities by providing an overview and rationale of their team’s work shows that this is a significant issue for learning and teaching support staff.

The comments of those participants who do not have a managerial role show that they perceive themselves to be in a defensive position, and they did not, with one exception, mention initiating discussion about their roles. This is despite the fact that most survey respondents and interview participants stated that they often initiated discussions with academic staff. Their perceived status and the institutional culture may contribute to this, but there may also be a lack of expectation that this is necessary, or even desirable. There may also be a wish to negotiate but a lack of the necessary skills, despite the ‘people skills’ referred to by participants, or a fear of failure. Those who have experienced related discussion about aspects of their role may simply become tired of trying. The implications of this are that the situation is unlikely to change and that

learning and support staff will remain in what most of them perceive as a negative position in terms of their relationships with other staff.

Analysis of the findings in relation to how difference is perceived may also contribute to the understanding of identity for this group of staff.

6.4.4 Difference, ‘Othering’ and power

One of the areas that the research aims to explore is whether the concepts of difference and ‘Othering’ are significant in relation to the identity of learning and teaching support staff. In terms of difference, the findings, some of which have been commented on in the preceding section, show that this tends to have a negative impact on identity.

Although the institution’s documents and web pages express the aim of having a united staff there is no positive mention of diversity and difference, and there is a lack of description or explanation as to the roles or value of professional services staff.

Additionally, the institutional aim is not necessarily supported by institutional practice.

One manager commented that their work would have to be carried out by a faculty if the service did not exist, which supports the comments made above (6.4.1), implying that a ‘difference culture’ is partly imposed by institutional structure.

Respondents’ perceptions of identity were most strongly expressed in terms of opposition to academic identity, with managers and those who had made the transition from academic to service posts expressing this more strongly than other staff. The language used in responses about perceptions of difference reflects the strength of respondents’ feelings about this divide with words such as ‘outsider’, ‘threat’, ‘them and us’ indicating that the sense of difference was experienced negatively. Interestingly, the academic and professional services division does not seem to have strengthened respondents’ sense of belonging to a professional services community, except in the case of those managers who expressed a view that shared values help to bind service teams together. This may well be partly due to the lack of a shared identity among the professional service teams, as mentioned above.

The perception of the existence of two oppositional communities is again in line with research findings in the sector as a whole (Taylor,1999; Deem and Johnson, 2000; Hellowell and Hancock 2001; Gornall, 2009; Lauwerys, 2009). The participants' comments on the separation of academic staff from learning and teaching support staff show that this is perceived to place the latter in a lower status. The academic colleagues' comments referring to taking 'a step back' mentioned by the participant who had moved from a faculty to a 'central' service, albeit to a higher grade post, highlight this perception. This also suggests why support staff whose work was perceived to be 'academic' are more likely to think they are valued and why 'academic' knowledge is highly valued by participants. The desire to associate oneself with a dominant group has been noted (Tajfel, 1981; Simon, 2004), especially where group identity is weak.

The findings showed that some participants perceive that difference leads to exclusion, as the comments on how academic staff behaved towards each other, as opposed to how they behaved towards professional service staff show. The described attitudes of some academic staff also suggest that difference is not viewed favourably. Participants' frequent references to the need to justify their work and occasional ones to experiencing indifference or rudeness, and one manager's comment on the use by academic staff of the term 'the rump' to describe professional services staff exemplify this. A perceived lack of shared values underpins many of the findings, which echoes much of the research and writing about academic identity . The sense of professional services staff not being valued by the academic community was not one which was being addressed by the institution at the time the survey and interviews were carried out, despite awareness of the perception being noted at service director level. Participants' comments suggested that lack of knowledge or understanding of their work was one of the reasons for its not being valued, and I consider that this was due in part to their own difficulties, noted in the findings, in articulating what their roles involved. Participants themselves were not always sure that their work was related to learning and teaching support, even though this might have been stated by a line manager, or indicated by their location in a particular team or by their job description. However, this issue cannot be attributed to a single factor, since the findings indicate a more complex picture.

The participant group's norms also mark them as different, although these include some positive contributions to identity. The strong service ethos expressed by some participants, although not widespread, is a source of self-esteem and confidence. The references to 'excellent service' in some parts of the institutional documentation and web pages, although not consistent, suggest that this is seen as a desirable differentiator.

Difference therefore does not emerge as positive concept but rather as a source of conflict. The perception of not feeling valued and frequently experiencing the need to justify roles or posts implies a concept of division, as opposed to diversity. While the findings do not indicate any deliberate attempts to 'Other' learning and teaching support staff, they suggest that the prevailing cultures in the institution encourage some aspects of 'Othering'. The way in which learning and teaching support staff are portrayed, or the absence of mention, on webpages and in some institution-level documents is one example of this. Similarly, while participants did not express any sense of oppression, some articulated a sense of identity and role restriction. There is also evidence that there is dissatisfaction among the participants with the binary divide between academic and professional support staff and some of the attitudes which this divide creates, which are not being challenged in any consistent way in the institution, although participants are attempting to build bridges at an individual level. The majority of the findings also evidence the legitimisation of power through acceptance, although some staff, especially at managerial level, are attempting to change the *status quo* in relation to how the work of their service is perceived and valued. Some managers also considered that their work was valued by senior management, even if it was not by most academic staff.

However, the shifting nature of identity is clearly a source of uncertainty and concern among participants. As mentioned above, while there is dissatisfaction with being 'Othered', the findings show that the majority of the staff in the study would not find it easy to negotiate 'third space' working. The resistance to aspects of their work mentioned by participants also suggests that there would be little appetite in the institution to assist such negotiation. In this sense, the 'colonial divide' would appear to be unlikely to change. Difference is supporting 'Othering', which in turn has an impact on identity for learning and teaching support staff. The findings suggest that the

embryonic development or emergence of changing identities for learning and teaching support staff threatens the dominant academic identities, which in turn leads to resistance or suppression. Similarly, cultural difference is perceived to lead to roles not being valued.

An additional consideration relates to confidence and articulacy. Some professional services staff may lack the skills their academic colleagues possess in presenting and arguing a case effectively, which would thus put them at a disadvantage when seeking culture change, especially if this is not supported at senior management level. They may also feel that they lack the authority to attempt to negotiate change, or that this conflicts with their service role and that they should support rather than challenge.

Avoidance of open discussion about the issues relating to role and identity for learning and teaching support staff, while probably not deliberate, nevertheless serves to maintain the *status quo*. One of the ways in which a lower status group is denied a voice is through the prevention of their concerns entering key discourses. There are no forums in which role and identity can be discussed and during the period that the research was being undertaken no staff opinion survey was carried out. One participant's statement that: '... yes everyone has a voice. But it's the extent to which you feel ... capable of kind of like using it' (IP1), may refer as much to an individual's ability as to the prevailing culture. However, this lack of provision for discussion and negotiation, and the lack of opportunity to challenge the dominant discourses, means that the only route for learning and teaching support staff to make comment or to question is through line managers, who may themselves feel unable to raise the issues for a variety of reasons. This perceived silencing is disempowering and repressive.

The tensions relating to role which emerge from the findings are in part associated with the negotiation of power. In trying and sometimes failing to establish the boundaries of their roles, learning and teaching support staff, probably unintentionally, challenge the authority of their academic colleagues who may resist through dismissive attitudes or not recognising the validity of the work being undertaken. This is likely to be

exacerbated when this work is perceived as not supporting, or as going against, academic norms and values. A service ethos makes it difficult for the 'subaltern' to insist, especially where they lack confidence themselves about their role. Since this in turn is likely to make them less credible, a vicious circle is likely to emerge.

While no specific questions were asked about power, it was mentioned by a number of participants, and a sense of disempowerment also emerges as a strong theme from the findings. With a few exceptions, respondents described passive experience of changes, including restructuring, which often had a significant impact on their roles. Having new post titles which they did not think accurately described their roles also reflected this sense of having changes imposed on them. However, restructuring also provided opportunities for input into role development in some cases. Emerging as a positive aspect of the comparative lack of role guidance was the fact that because some respondents had been given the opportunity to shape their own job descriptions, or because the descriptions did not delineate responsibilities precisely, this provided a degree of freedom that respondents with sufficient confidence felt they had benefitted from in terms of being able to develop their posts in line with their interest or skills.

In part, the sense of disempowerment relates to the expectations related to roles, which again reflects the norms and values of the institutional cultures. References to 'towing the line', or not being represented on committees, and being limited to providing a good service provide examples of this. Similarly, the ability to change one's place in the 'pecking order' is perceived to be dependent on academic qualifications: '... well, it is an education institution isn't it, so yeah' (IP2), suggesting that the participants accept the dominance of academic knowledge. Other expectations also have the potential to limit power, for example that academics have 'freedom' while professional service staff are 'managed', and that professional staff do not carry out research. The participant who previously held an academic role described the expectations she had held in relating to behaviours: 'I thought when I came over, oh you know, I'll have to be less outspoken and I'll have to be more careful' (IP9), which supports the view expressed by other participants about not having a voice. She had also expected learning and teaching

support staff to be more 'corporate', a view which again suggests compliance with norms.

There is also a sense of disempowerment in terms of working relationships with academic colleagues, which were expressed in the descriptions of steps taken to change attitudes or to seek recognition for their work. Findings relating to participants with a managerial role indicate that they are at times frustrated by experiences which they perceive as disempowering, but that some of them have developed strategies for dealing with this. Hellowell and Hancock (2001) comment on the need for: 'abilities to listen, persuade, cajole and, in general, act with considerable patience' (p.69) when working with academic staff, and those participants who referred to their use of such skills saw them as contributing to the success of their work, which in turn led to increased confidence. The findings suggest that there is a lack of confidence among staff supporting learning and teaching, which is partly due to their perception that they frequently need to justify or defend their work to members of the academic community, who are resistant or even hostile to their approaches. Staff whose work is most easily recognisable as 'academic' in nature experience less resistance than those who are carrying out more 'administrative' tasks. Those supporting students, as opposed to academic staff, also perceive that their work is generally accepted by academic staff. In contrast, where respondents' work necessitates their requiring academic staff to carry out certain tasks, as in the case of members of the quality support team, the need to tread carefully and to prove their worth is more strongly felt. There is an interesting correspondence here with the frequently published view across the sector that academic authority is threatened by increased managerialism and bureaucracy, and that the increase in quality assurance management in particular has reduced academic autonomy (Taylor, 1999; Brennan and Shah, 2000; Malcolm and Zukas, 2000; Rowland, 2002).

The findings suggest that difference is an aspect of identity which learning and teaching staff tend to experience negatively and which relates to a sense of disempowerment. The institutional structure and the silencing of alternative discourses contribute to this experience, but the norms and values of the group also play a part.

6.4.5 Communities and cultures

No overt development of a learning and teaching support community existed in the institution at the time the research was carried out, which may relate to the weak professional identity among the group. Participants commented on this lack when asked about community but did not mention it unless asked, which suggests there is no expectation that it should exist. One respondent described the attempt she and a colleague had made to set up a community of practice, which she thought had failed because people had not wanted it.

The sense of an academic community emerged, although one participant commented that neither the faculties nor the professional services were cohesive entities. With one exception, participants did not feel part of the academic community, although the two who had made the transition from academic to supports posts considered they had retained aspects of their academic identities. No internal professional services community was being fostered and there did not appear to be a sense of such a community, with the exception of the participant who provided a definition of professional services and who saw himself as belonging to that community, although he added that he did not see everyone in the community as being equal partners and would be unlikely to describe himself as working in professional services. The view of one participant was echoed by others: 'I don't sit in that group. I don't sort of ... sit anywhere' (IP1).

This may relate in part to the fact that the services are physically located in different buildings and are often engaged in very different kinds of activities, with one participant commenting on a lack of cross-service understanding of each other's work. Although there was an acknowledgement of cross-services working in relation to learning and teaching support, this did not translate into a community. Although the director of Human Resources commented that business needs led to joint working, as exemplified by cross-institution working groups, she also acknowledged that strong working relationships tended to be forged by accident rather than by design.

While there was a sense of external community, encouraged by the AUA, among some teams, this was not widespread and did not emerge from the findings as significant in terms of supporting identity.

In summary, while the data proved to be complex, analysis and consideration of the findings indicated that a number of conclusions could be drawn in relation to the research questions.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

7.1 Answers to the research questions

The research aimed to explore what the perceptions of learning and teaching support staff in a single HE institution were in relation to their role and identity and how these perceptions were constructed. In undertaking the research, I was aware that I would be exploring an area that would not be easy to interpret. Published writing on social identity discussed in Chapter Three (Brah, 1996; Hall, 1997; Crow and Maclean 2006) emphasises the complexity and contested nature of this concept and it is therefore not surprising that the findings support this view. Not only do a variety of perceptions emerge but identity is not a concept that it was easy for the research participants to articulate their views about. However, some consistent perceptions emerge, as does a picture of how these perceptions had been formed. Also unsurprisingly, given that the research was focussed on a work environment, role and identity emerge as intertwined, with role having a crucial impact on how the staff perceive themselves and how they consider they are perceived by others.

While some individual staff members have a clear view of their role, the overall perceptions of the group suggest weak professional identity. This is evidenced through their expressed understanding of the concepts of profession and professionalism, and the attributes, such as knowledge, skills and professional training and development, associated with these. Library staff as a sub-group are an exception to this, and the external professional requirements for their roles mentioned by these participants provide a partial explanation for the difference. Similarly, this is the only sub-group whose members express clear perceptions relating to the impact of changes in the sector on their role and identity.

Despite being located in a wider group called ‘professional services’, learning and teaching support staff identity does not emerge as associated with this grouping, nor as strongly linked to learning and teaching support, but tends to be associated with the smaller teams in which staff sharing related roles are located. This may be in part

because the teams were not altered by the restructuring of those service areas that provide learning and teaching support, which has provided a measure of stability for their members. The norms and values of these teams are understood by their members and although role requirements have changed for some of the members, the teams thus provide a welcome sense of continuity. Although cross-group liaison takes place, working within the smaller team is more usual and thus reinforces the team identity.

In terms of the construction of the identity of the wider group, a number of related conclusions are indicated. The inconsistent representation of professional services staff in published documentation and on the website, practices in relation to the recruitment, induction and staff development, and inconsistency of approach of individual line managers may all contribute to the lack of a strong, shared view of professional identity. However, identity formation does not depend exclusively on the deliberate attempts made by an institution to foster it and other factors emerged as significant, including the expectations of individuals in relation to profession and professionalism, their ability to meet the professional requirements of their role and the readiness of academic and other professional services staff to treat them as fellow professionals. While the findings here are more varied, there are also some consistencies. On the whole, senior staff and those with high levels of resilience and independence, and a clear view of their roles, emerge as most likely to see negotiation of such issues as part of their professional role and for this to have a positive impact on their identity. In contrast, those with less ability to analyse and articulate their roles struggle to find a strong sense of professional identity. Finally, the high proportion of staff who have not deliberately chosen learning and teaching support, the lack of a clear career path and the status of learning and teaching in the institution also emerge as related factors.

Perceptions in relation to roles and their relationship to identity support some of the conclusions mentioned above but are also reflected through some other consistently expressed comments and documentary evidence. The fact that this group of staff carry out some work that is not concerned with learning and teaching, or is not perceived by others to relate to it, means that their professional identity is not linked to that area alone. The prevalence of broad responsibilities which may or may not relate to learning and

teaching, such as staff development, is another factor. The wide range and complexity of roles and the fact that these are not always set out in job descriptions or adequately captured in post titles is viewed as confusing and constitutes a source of stress and anxiety for many participants, although this is not an issue for managers. However, in a few cases, the lack of specificity provides a sense of liberation and thus has a positive impact on identity. The perceived lack of clarity is also seen as affecting the views of academic staff about learning and teaching support staff, especially where roles are not understood and therefore liable to be challenged. This in turn affects how learning and teaching support staff view themselves.

Perceptions of role and identity vary according to which areas of learning and teaching staff support. Those staff who perceive that their role requires 'academic' knowledge or those who have a specialist skill that academic staff recognise the need for are more likely to feel valued. Interestingly however, the sub-group with the most varied perceptions of identity and with members who express a high level of anxiety in relation to role and identity was the one whose work is most closely related to that of academic staff, which may reflect a high level of awareness in relation to identity and boundaries. The staff who carry out work which is closer to that of more traditional administrative staff, specifically quality support, are more likely to perceive the need to justify and define their work which in turn has a negative impact on their self-confidence.

A related general perception is concerned with difference. Identity for the group of staff studied emerges as partly resulting from opposition to academic identity, with the group as a whole perceiving itself to be, or considered to be, of lower status within the institution. In some cases, this has led to a sense of exclusion, and other aspects of 'Othering' are reflected in participants' comments. These include perceptions relating to restriction and disempowerment which the prevailing institutional discourses, cultures and structures were believed to maintain. However, participants' own difficulties in articulating role and identity play a part in this and may well relate to the fact that institutional aims in relation to achieving unity and collaboration among staff have not been achieved, rather than indicating a conscious intention to disempower one group.

In terms of exploring boundaries and discovering whether ‘third space’ working is occurring and affecting identity, the conclusions are again mixed. However, shared perceptions exist in relation to role and identity which indicate that ‘blended’ professionals are rare in this staff grouping. Posts rarely span academic and professional areas and, although varied, are rarely hybrid in the sense of removing or even crossing boundaries. Perceptions relating to the nature of ‘service’, the institutional structure and cultures, and expectations relating to behaviours, initiating partnership working and role limitations are all notable in this regard. While different attitudes towards these issues are expressed, they are generally perceived to constrain rather than enhance identity. However, frequently repeated negotiations of role and the impact of these on identity show that this is very much a ‘live’ issue and support the concept of identity as dynamic and constantly changing. It also indicates that for both learning and teaching support staff and their academic colleagues there is a recognition that roles have changed in the institution and that attempts to understand these changes are taking place, which might lead to changing relationships, including an increase in partnership working in the future. However, it also shows that resistance to change is significant and this might indicate that learning and teaching support staff are likely to struggle in their attempts to establish a different identity.

Nevertheless, the overall view is not as clear cut as some of the conclusions mentioned above suggest. Some of the data are contradictory and unclear, and this is particularly the case where relationships between academic and learning and teaching support staff and the effect of these relationships on identity are concerned. While the polarisation between the two groupings, which is extensively commented on in literature relating to academic identity (Taylor, 1999; Deem and Johnson, 2000; Hellowell and Hancock 2001; Gornall, 2009; Lauwerys, 2009), is confirmed there are varying perceptions of this in relation to the identity of learning and teaching support staff. These perceptions are related to concepts such as values and norms, credibility, dominant knowledge and empowerment. However, discussion of identity included strong emotional responses, indicating that the impact on identity is often significant. Institutional structure and policy emerge as factors affecting collaborative working, as do business demands. Where they are required, liaison and partnership working occur but are not actively

fostered, and institutional aspiration in this regard does not emerge as supported by practice.

While only one participant commented on the lack of an overtly recognisable community of learning and teaching to which support staff might feel they belonged, this did emerge as a gap which affected identity. The structure and culture of the institution both contribute to this, but while such communities could be encouraged and fostered institutionally, if there is no perceived need among staff themselves, or if a community does not emerge naturally, this suggests that it would be an artificial construct. One conclusion therefore is that learning and teaching do not form a significant aspect of their professional identity for a number of staff, despite where they are placed in the institutional structure.

In terms of how far changes in the sector affect role and identity for learning and teaching support staff in the institution, a number of conclusions can be drawn from the research. The institution's mission and strategy reflect the development in the wider sector which in turn have been affected by government policies. The implementation of these strategic aims has led to changes to the structure and the group name of professional services staff, and the rationale for these changes is recognised by the interview participants, particularly in relation to quality assurance and enhancement. However, with the exception of the few participants who had been invited to contribute to their new job descriptions, staff were not involved in the change processes, other than as recipients, and one shared perception is that such changes occur, to which they then have to adapt. The changes are thus not 'owned' by the staff concerned and may not be understood by staff outside the immediately affected group. Lack of self-confidence in relation to roles emerges as partly related to the changes that have taken place and the impact they have had, on both the staff themselves and their academic colleagues. While strategic and policy documents suggest aspirations relating to the development of professional services staff, in recognition of the changing external environment, these again emerge as only partly realised.

7.2 Implications of the research

The conclusions above show that professional identity is weak for this group of staff and that this may have an impact on how they work and on how their work is perceived by others, despite the stated intentions in institutional documentation. This implies that more deliberate steps would be in order if the institution wishes to implement its stated intentions with regard to staff unity and effective partnership working. The conclusions also have implications for the recruitment, induction and the supported professional development of the staff concerned. Additionally, they indicate that the presentation of the staff in documents and webpages would need to be enhanced in order to provide a more consistent presentation of this group of staff.

7.3 Reliability and validity

The case study is replicable and I suggest below why this might be desirable. The research methods and the instruments could be used again without making any changes. Hesse-Biber (2010) argues that using both qualitative and quantitative methods can enhance the validity and reliability of findings. The findings from the survey and interviews in this study in relation to the broad topic areas were generally aligned, the key area of difference being responses to the motivation for taking up posts in learning and teaching support. Although this might be expected since most of the interview participants also took part in the survey, it provides a level of triangulation for the interview data which increases the validity of the findings. The use of triangulation through the interview with the director of HR and the institutional documents also contributes to this.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, I considered that the fact that I was the director of the one of the services from which survey respondents and interview participants were drawn might affect the way people responded. However, when coding and analysing the data there were two factors which suggested this had not been an issue. The first was

that although this had not been deliberately avoided, neither the survey nor the interview questions invited responses where people needed to justify their views or their actions and so very few comments were made which put them in a favourable or unfavourable light. Although the interview questions encouraged them to talk about their experiences and views, only the questions relating to perceptions of value resulted in participants reflecting on themselves in terms of such matters as performance, behaviours and service delivered. Secondly, the views and issues which emerged were often very similar for participants across all the service teams which suggested that there was no attempt being made by members of one service area to provide answers which they thought I, as the manager of their service, should hear.

In terms of the area being researched and anticipation of my expectations, I knew some but not all of the survey respondents and all the interview participants except one. As I was comparatively new in post when I carried out the research and had been very careful not to mention what I was researching before I invited people to participate, I was reasonably confident that staff in my own service would not be able to guess what they thought I would like to hear. However, the survey questions and interviews with early participants would have given the remaining interview participants a good idea about what I was researching and so I must assume that some of them tried to anticipate answers they thought I wanted.

7.4 Limitations of the research

Since this is a case study with a limited number of respondents and participants, the findings cannot be considered as representative of learning and teaching staff perceptions across the sector. However, it is worth highlighting the fact that some findings align with publicised research outcomes and other writing discussed in Chapter Three which suggests that they are shared by some professional services staff in other institutions. However, since the case study is effectively a 'snapshot', further research would be necessary to see how far they are representative.

7.5 Further research

There are several areas that it would be useful to research in order to obtain a fuller picture of the outcomes of this case study. It would be extremely helpful to carry out a comparative study with at least one other institution, for example in a different part of the sector, to see where similarities and differences lie. Although some of the findings supported research outcomes from elsewhere in the sector, such as the division between academic and professional service staff, others showed a different outcome, for example the lack of blended professionals among staff with a managerial role.

It would also be useful to carry out the survey across the sector to explore how far issues relating to posts and roles, and to feeling valued, are experienced.

The perceptions of some of the academic staff in the institution would also provide a balance to those of the staff surveyed and interviewed. In particular, it would be useful to have their views on such issues as role expectations, norms and value, empowerment and cultures.

Finally, since a new learning and teaching strategy is in place, considerable changes have taken place at the most senior level of management, further restructuring is in train and additional changes are planned within the institution, it would be worth repeating the study internally in two years' time to see what impact all of these have had on the roles and identity of learning and teaching support staff.

7.6 Using the research outcomes

I had chosen the research topic and had established the aims before I came to the institution where it was carried out. Although, as mentioned in Chapter Four, it was necessary to re-consider these, I did not make significant changes so there was no original intention to undertake emancipatory research. However, some of the findings are of concern to me as a service director and have prompted ideas as to useful steps that could be taken as a result of the research. These relate to the professional development

of learning and teaching support staff, and the representation of this group of staff in print and on webpages. I believe that helping to develop their understanding of profession and professionalism would benefit both this group of staff and the wider institution. I would also like to work with Human Resources to consider how best to support both professional services staff members' confidence and academic staff members' understanding of their roles. The findings also suggested that there would be some benefit in encouraging further discussion in the institution between academic and professional services staff about the roles of the latter group.

While the contribution of the research to the field will therefore be initially focussed on the institution where it was carried out, it has the potential to lead to further research and also provides a contribution to a field which has been the subject of limited research so far. It extends the existing research, notably that of Whitchurch, and in focussing on the perceptions of learning and teaching support staff it gives a voice to a normally unheard group and complements the extensive literature on academic identity.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: List of institutional documents examined

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Appendix 1: List of institutional documents examined

1. Academic Enhancement Unit Restructure – briefing document (dated 3rd March 2011)
2. Academic Enhancement Unit curriculum team (undated)
3. Human Resources Strategy (dated 2008)
4. Leadership of a newly established Academic Enhancement Unit via appointment of a Director of Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement - briefing paper (undated)
5. Job descriptions for staff in Academic Enhancement Unit (undated)
6. Learning Development Unit Staffing Structure (undated)
7. Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2007-2012
8. NW Universities Network draft behaviours and competency frameworks - unpublished (received December 2011)
9. Proposal to centralise quality management functions (undated)
10. Quality staff structure changes (undated)
11. Revised Academic Committee Structure – paper for Academic Board (dated 14th March) 2011)
12. Staff Handbook (undated)
13. University prospectus (2011)
14. Model for embedding World of Work skills – draft paper (dated June 211)

Appendix 2: Survey questionnaire

[Note: This document has been reformatted for inclusion in the thesis.]

The identities and roles of professional services staff in relation to learning and teaching in a single higher education institution: Questionnaire for participants

Please note that you will need to refer to your current job description when completing the questionnaire.

1. Your current post

- 1.1 What is your post title:
- 1.2 Which department of the University do you work in:
- 1.3 How long have you been in your current post:
 - 1.3.1 What aspect(s) of learning and teaching does your post relate to (e.g. quality assurance; staff development etc.):
 - 1.3.2 Does your job description make specific reference to duties relating to learning and teaching? Yes/ No
 - 1.3.3 Please describe briefly any work you carry out which relates to learning and teaching but which is not mentioned in your job description
 - 1.3.4 Please mention any person specifications in your job description which relate specifically to learning and teaching related aspects of the post

2. Your qualifications

- 2.1 What is your highest level academic qualification:
- 2.2. Do you have a qualification which relates to learning and teaching? Yes/No

If *yes*, what is it?

2.3 Please list any non-learning and teaching related professional qualifications that you hold.

2.4 Does your current post require any of the qualifications you hold? Yes/No.

If *yes*, please state which one(s):

3 Previous posts held

3.1 Have you held other posts in higher education? Yes/No

3.2 If *yes*, please list any posts you have held which involved work relating to learning and teaching in higher education and briefly describe what this work was

4 You and your work

4.1 Did you make a deliberate decision to work in a learning and teaching related area of higher education. Yes/No

If *yes*, please explain why:

If *no*, please give your motivation for accepting your current post:

4.2 Do you work as part of a team which carries out learning and teaching related work?

Yes/ No

4.3 Have you undertaken any staff development relating to learning and teaching in the last 2 years (or since your current post started if you have held it for less than 2 years)?

Yes/ No

4.4 Does your post involve line management of staff whose work includes learning and teaching related activities? Yes/ No

4.5 Does your work require specialist skills? Yes/ No

If *yes*, what are they?

4.6 Does your work involve contributing to the development of University policies relating to learning and teaching? Yes/ No

4.7 Does your work give you the opportunity to contribute to decisions made about learning and teaching (e.g. through membership of relevant committees) Yes/ No

4.8 Does your work involve liaising with professional services staff in other departments? Yes/No

If *yes*, who normally initiates this work (please select one of the following) :

I do/ Staff in other services do/ It varies

4.9 Does your work involve liaison with academic staff? Yes/No

If *yes*, who normally initiates this work (please select one of the following) :

I do/ Academic staff do / It varies

4.10 In your opinion, is the learning and teaching related work you carry out valued by staff in other professional services in the University? Yes/ No

4.11 In your opinion, is the learning and teaching related work you carry out valued by academic staff in the University? Yes/No

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please email pages 1-4 **only** to (*email address*). Please do **not** add your name to the questionnaire.

The next steps in my research will involve confidential interviews with members of staff. Please consider whether you would be willing for me to contact you about possible participation in the interview stage. Please note that this does not commit you to participating.

If you are willing for me to contact you, please edit, cut and paste the reply below and email it to (*email address*) using the subject heading 'RIPS research'

I am willing to be contacted about possible participation in the interview stages of this research.

Name:

Email address:

Appendix 3: Information for potential participants in research project

Why is the research being carried out?

The research is being carried out as part of the Doctor in Education (EdD) programme. It is not being carried out as part of my work as an employee at (*institution*).

Research supervisor: (*Name*), The University of Sheffield.

Research topic

The research will explore the constructs of the identities and roles of professional services staff in relation to learning and teaching in (*institution*). The aim of the research is to discover the nature of the constructs and how they are created. It also aims to understand how these constructs affect the support and development of learning and teaching by professional services and academic staff. It will also explore how the approaches to support and development within the institution impact on identity and role constructs.

What does participation involve?

Initial participation is through a survey. You will be asked to complete and return a written questionnaire. Participants may also wish to consider participating in a later interview stage but participation in the survey does not commit you to this.

How will my anonymity be protected if I participate?

Participants will be protected from identification in the following ways:

- A coding system will be used for the returned questionnaires to ensure participant anonymity.
- All data will be stored securely
- No data will be shared
- All findings will be reported in such a way that individuals cannot be identified

As mentioned above this is piece of student research. However, it is possible that I may wish to make use of the anonymised findings as a basis for work relating to my post in the (*named department*) in the future. If this proves to be the case, your consent for this additional use of the data would then be sought.

The research has received ethical approval from the University of Sheffield's Research Ethics Committee, and has been endorsed by (*institution name*).

What if I change my mind?

You can withdraw your consent to participate at any time. Any data collected would then be destroyed.

Researcher: Jackie Gresham

Appendix 4: Consent to participate in research project form

Research topic: The constructs of the identities and roles of professional services staff in relation to learning and teaching in a single higher education institution.

I understand:

- the nature and purpose of the research being undertaken
- that the data obtained will be anonymised in the thesis
- that the data will not be shared with anyone else by the researcher
- that the data obtained will be stored securely
- that the researcher is carrying out this research as part of a doctoral programme and not in her capacity as an employee of (*institution*)
- that my consent will be sought if the researcher wishes to use anonymised findings in the future as a basis for institutional development
- that I can withdraw from participating at any time by informing the researcher

By signing this form I give my consent to participating in this research.

Name:

Date:

Signature:

Name of researcher: Jackie Gresham

Date:

Signature

Appendix Five: Semi-structured interview prompts

[Note: PS = professional services. L&T = learning and teaching)

1. Tell me about your career in PS so far: explore any changes of direction - reasons for these ; posts changing/morphing; any previous L&T related work
2. Tell me about your current post: (use roles diagram) ; explore relationship between roles and job title, and roles and job description; how these inform own and others' understanding of roles; what else informs this, including how else learnt about their roles; how describe role to others; view re. post fit in university structure
3. Qualifications: academic and professional, and explore understanding re. latter; post requirements/obtained in order to obtain post (s) or pursue career or other reasons
4. Skills: explore 'specialist' and understanding of this, and attitudes to skills and professionalism
5. Training and development and contribution to perceptions of role/identity; how frequent and what type; what aspects of role does T&D support; does it develop professionalism; induction to post; professional association membership etc.
6. Motivations for post choice: explore any changes to these during career and why
7. Professional services: what does 'professional' mean to you; PS significant community? which other(s) do you identify with
8. How do you describe your role to others? PS vs. academic roles re. L&T - where roles overlap/complement; who initiates contact with academics and vice versa and for what type of activity (examples); has this changed during career and how?
9. Work valued by: other PS staff; academic staff; reward and recognition by what means; reasons for perceptions; self; examples/reasons for perceptions; perceptions re. general PS as well as personal work

Appendix 6: Sample pages of the coded data

Taken from Interview Participant 6 coded tapescript

(CHE = changes in HE; CP = changes in profession; Expcs = Expectations ; JT = Job title; Profbs = professional behaviours; Rec = recognition Rdef =definitions of role; TEL = Technology enhanced learning; Val = Valued)

<p>V: ... and you know I was at Aberdeen at the time and you had professors practically barricading the doors to say don't let this IT stuff in here and you still have a lot of that and I think that's part of our changing way of doing things that we've seen we must embrace this or we really have no jobs you know if we let other people do that and I think librarians missed a big trick in early days, they wanted to catalogue the internet you know and they didn't get, they wanted to hang on to the cataloguing rules and catalogue it and we did, we catalogued websites ...</p>	<p>TEL/ CHE</p> <p>CP</p>
<p>JG: Yeah</p> <p>V: ... you know and we just didn't quite see how it was going to go</p> <p>JG: But how could you?</p>	
<p>V: I think I don't think anybody did but I don't think we did it very well as a profession and I think that's where we lost ground a little bit and other people who managed to call it something swanky like metadata or Social Tagging took over you know so I think there have been big sea changes that have affected us and there are others that we've grasped ...</p>	<p>CP</p>
<p>JG: Yes</p> <p>V: ...and made something of and taken forward and I think now the problem is recognition that we have expressed these</p> <p>JG: And your professional identity has survived nonetheless?</p> <p>V: I think it is</p> <p>JG: yeah</p>	<p>Rec/val</p>
<p>V: and I think you know I'm one of the advocates that the word library and the word librarian can encompass and awful lot, it doesn't need to be the traditional view</p>	<p>Rdef</p>
<p>JG: no</p> <p>V: ...it ... and that people will understand certain things included in</p>	<p>Rdef</p>

<p>that word and they will expect certain things. I think our students do and I think when they're a bit nervous and a bit fearful they think I'll go to the library it's a safe place without thinking that consciously</p> <p>JG: that's interesting</p>	Expcs.
<p>V: you know between lectures and thinking oh my goodness what do I do now, the library, great, I can go there, I know it, I can sit down, I can kind of have a little thing to myself, I can read you know, I can use a PC whatever and I think that sort of neutral working, managed working space to me is terribly important</p> <p>JG: Yeah</p>	Expcs
<p>V: that students can just go there and either get on with their work or just meet people, or just have a look and see what other people are doing and help them to find their feet a little bit at the beginning</p> <p>JG: you said you know that's, that safety's an unconscious thing but they expect certain things, what, do you think they expect certain things of library staff?</p>	Expcs
<p>V: yes and I think they expect us to have rules, and I think they expect us to tell them off when we, when they break them, and they still break them</p> <p>JG: Yeah</p>	Profbs/ expcs.
<p>V: but I think they expect us not to let things slip too far in terms of</p> <p>JG: ok</p> <p>V: litter and eating and noise and behaviour</p>	Profbs/ expcs
<p>JG: so they expect you to have professional standards</p> <p>V: I think they do yeah. And where that comes from you don't know, you know maybe from their experience of the public libraries, the school libraries</p> <p>JG: maybe</p>	Profbs/expcs
<p>V: and I think even though they might moan about some of the things that we do I think they still expect them</p> <p>JG: yeah, yeah. Probably quite like them secretly</p> <p>V: Mmm</p>	Expcs
<p>JG: OK so what is your job title (<i>name</i>)?</p> <p>V: it's now Head of Research and Learner Support</p> <p>JG: and do you think your job title captures what you do</p> <p>V: I think yes, I might have put it the other way around Learner and</p>	JT

<p>Research Support</p> <p>JG: learner first</p> <p>V: because I think people hear Head of Research and they think I'm something to do with the Research Office</p> <p>JG: yeah</p> <p>V: I like the word research being in there because it's, (<i>service director</i>) kind of set it out, she said I don't want people to think that this place is just about under graduates and that's, the focus is so much on that she said we must still be the library for staff as well</p> <p>JG: Yeah</p> <p>V: and that's absolutely true, and that's why it's in there, but nobody can ever remember it</p> <p>JG: your job title</p> <p>V: yes</p> <p>JG: that's interesting. So do you ever get asked what does that mean</p> <p>V: yes and what do you do yes</p> <p>JG: ok. So when you are asked that question how do you respond</p> <p>V: well usually I say I manage the team of liaison librarians and I quite often use the word librarians although that's not in their job title and I manage the book budget and they understand that</p> <p>JG: ok</p> <p>V: buy the books and do the liaison</p> <p>JG: ok so is nobody called a librarian?</p> <p>V: not at the moment no. I might make a move to bring it back at some point because we got the word library back we're now Library and Student Support</p>	<p>JT</p> <p>Expcs</p> <p>JT/Expcs</p> <p>Rdef.</p> <p>Rdef./JT</p>
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Appendix 7: Sample pages of the coding table

(E.= related emotion. Emp.= empowerment)

Role continued	Comment	Part.	Page
Role change – unplanned. Emp.	I was sort of brought, I came to work on a short term contract to work on this sort of the development of this negotiated work based learning program called Learning at Work	IP1	1
Role change- within one area	I've always done within a role that was to do with support of work related learning, work based learning, employability in some way	IP1	1
Role change - unplanned but opportunity. Emp.	I was sort of moved over to look more at sort of general work based learning. And then the CETL came along and that was I suppose it was an opportunity that I was offered and I took really because it, I thought I saw it as an opportunity to sort of develop to do something a bit more differently	IP1	2
Role change -- unplanned E. problematic	I think I just sort of morphed from one thing in to the other and that I thinks caused problems really because I think often I've never been quite clear where the boundaries of one thing start and end	IP1	2
Role change- self led E. confidence	I sort of created that sort of thread for myself and sort of a, cos sometimes I did feel a bit like a jack of all trades, master of none	IP1	2

Emp.			
Role change E. stress	I suppose these sorts of jobs they give you, they're good in some ways because you can just take them and run with them...but that can be quite stressful	IP1	2/3
Role change - within one area	...they were things that they're almost like unanswerable questions really ... so it's almost been those sort of smaller projects that I've enjoyed doing but perhaps haven't then kind of gone anywhere and I still always come back to the sort of the work based learning, work related learning	IPI	3
Role change	...role here was E portfolio development and training and support and that's changed a couple of times to the role that I am in now	IP2	1
Role change Unplanned Expansion	I guess new opportunities come in, new projects, new technologies coming in, I mean we found we were supporting these things anyway so our role didn't really cover the things that we were doing so I guess that's why it changed	IP2	1
Role change – JD Expansion E. happy	a bit of everything really erm so we were asked what do you want to put forward and what ...things do you want to include in it, but there were also certain things that were mandatory to put in it from sort of (<i>university name</i>) perspective... you do as your line manager says kind of, yeah...and support of the Blackboard system I was very happy...cos it broadened everything and it sort of made my job a lot more wider and in terms of my remit	IP2	2 7
Role change – unplanned E. reluctant	... it originally started as a job share 'cos I was a freelance consultant and trainer and then an opportunity arose and I was invited to apply because (<i>university name</i>) had been one of my clients and so they created a post of Management Development Advisor and I took that on, slightly reluctantly, but anyway I took it on and job shared with another,	IP4	1

	...then the person who was the, I don't know whether they called themselves Director or whatever, and it was within the Personnel function, so it was Staff Development within Personnel ...that person turned around to me one day and said I want to become a consultant and go freelance so can you mentor me and then I'll go and hopefully you'll be assimilated in to a role. So that's pretty much what happened actually		
Role change - uncertain	I think, I think it's actually stayed the same, I'm going to contradict myself now. Because there's still a requirement for Staff Development interventions, blended learning that really meet the needs ... at a corporate level	IP4	4
Role change – unplanned – response to business needs	I think in cases, when we decided to wind the business information service up... it was for technical reasons...because of copyright issues we couldn't do a lot of stuff we were doing (<i>head of service</i>) and others, they had a project going on then and they asked me to do it. And that's happened a couple of times in my role. That something's been happening and they've asked me to do it... But it's always been that a need that's been identified and rather than go through the process they've said well can we look at with???? job descriptions and we'll pick it up so...	IP 7	6
Relevant experience E. excitement	...(head of service) was thinking that we need to, it would be very difficult to operate that service...in the future so what, I spoke with her and we worked out what we called an exit strategy for it. But what she then said is they'd just completed a process about off campus access to the services and they were also starting another one of partnerships. So she'd asked if I would take that on, if that was you know, but what we kept on was the external clients side because I'd worked for an awful lot of people that were in businesses, were in services ...so I kept that on...and we dropped the business side for the private sector and you know we worked the rest in so. All with through Human Resources but... which I was quite excited by ...to be honest the challenges and I think to have some sort of change in your work every four years or something like that can...usually be an interesting thing ...[prompted] yeah yeah it is, healthy's the right word I think		11