Student and staff perceptions
and experiences of
employability at an English school
sixth-form

Master of Philosophy
Open University

Ian Wright Robinson
July 2020
There appears to be a disparity between school perceptions of student employability and the expectations of employers. Traditionally, statutory careers guidance has relied upon robust and reliable academic qualifications and transmitted knowledge of employability to prepare students for entry to the workplace. While there has been previous research into student employability, there have been few studies that have explored this notion in the secondary school context and even fewer that have explored the views of both staff and students. The aim of this study is to fill this gap in knowledge, by exploring staff and student perceptions and experiences of employability at a UK sixth-form.

In order to address the study’s research questions, staff and student expectations and experiences of employability were explored through a case study of an English school sixth-form. The study was situated in the interpretive paradigm, with qualitative data being collected from face-to-face interviews with the sixth-form vocational education co-ordinator, 11 sixth-form tutors, and four group interviews with a total of 18 sixth-form students. The data were analysed using established thematic analysis techniques, framed by the inter-related concepts of social and cultural capital, the agency of change, vocational habitus, and the workplace community of practice.

The key implications for developing student employability in the case study school-sixth form are that: (i) staff should act as mentors in order to develop student employability; (ii) each student should be given the opportunity of being mentored on a regular basis; (iii) each student should be made aware that their expected social goals from employment are likely to depend upon contributing to the organisation of work; (iv) each student should be made aware that their social and cultural capital is untried in the workplace; (v) each student should enter the workplace with a strategy for becoming an employee; (vi) statutory careers guidance should recognise the importance of individual student mentoring for all students in order to encourage an adequate allocation of school resources.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are a product of our past, and two people have enabled me to be in a position to write this thesis. My single parent mother worked long hours on a low wage to enable me to benefit from an assisted place at a Direct Grant school, an education which she did not fully understand. She lived long enough to see her three grandchildren. My wife, Carol, has been my companion on a journey which has taken us both into the education profession, both of us a product of social mobility.

I decided upon the topic of this thesis in order to benefit student transition from education to employment. Most students from my case study school relied upon academic qualifications for social mobility, and it is very much to the credit of the school’s senior management team and staff that 76% of students secured places at university from the 2015-16 Year 13 sixth-form intake. I was fortunate to work with a team who were committed to student education. Both students and staff provided a rich source of data for the study.

However, my best intentions would never have reached fruition had it not been for the encouragement and guidance of my two supervisors, Dr. Alan Floyd and Dr. Pete Bradshaw. They supported me in working at my own pace, and provided valuable understanding and feedback.
# TABLE of CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. 2
Acknowledgments .................................................................................................................. 3
Table of contents ................................................................................................................... 4
List of tables .......................................................................................................................... 7
List of figures .......................................................................................................................... 8
References ................................................................................................................................ 8
Appendices .............................................................................................................................. 8

**Chapter 1. The background to the study**

Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 9
1.1. The problem of student employability ......................................................................... 10
1.2. The study in context ..................................................................................................... 15
1.3. Research aims and questions ....................................................................................... 22
1.4. An overview of the conceptual framework ................................................................ 23
1.5. An overview of the methodology .............................................................................. 25
1.6. The significance and outcomes of the study ............................................................... 26
1.7. An overview of the study ............................................................................................ 27

**Chapter 2. Literature Review**

Introduction ........................................................................................................................... 29
2.1. The study’s conceptual framework .............................................................................. 30
   2.1.1 Social constructionism ............................................................................................. 31
   2.1.2. Social and cultural capital ....................................................................................... 34
   2.1.3. The agency of change ........................................................................................... 36
   2.1.4. Vocational habitus ................................................................................................. 37
   2.1.5. Community of practice ........................................................................................ 39
2.2. Student employability ................................................................................................... 41
   2.2.1. Personal attributes of employability ..................................................................... 42
   2.2.2. Belonging to a workplace ..................................................................................... 45
2.3. The contribution of secondary education to student employability ............................ 49
   2.3.1. The contribution of school to student employability .............................................. 49
2.3.2. Introducing employability mentors.............................................................. 52
2.3.3. Statutory careers guidance and the Futures programme............................ 54
2.3.4. The benefit of work experience to student employability............................ 56

2.4. Summary........................................................................................................... 59

Chapter 3. Methodology
Introduction .............................................................................................................. 63
3.1. Study Paradigm ................................................................................................. 63
3.2. Research methods and design ......................................................................... 65
  3.2.1. The Old School sixth-form as a case study................................................ 65
  3.2.2. Pilot study.................................................................................................... 67
  3.2.3. As a researcher, somewhere between an insider and an outsider.............. 73
  3.2.4. A purposeful sample.................................................................................... 74
  3.2.5. The collection of data.................................................................................. 77
  3.2.6. Individual and group interviews................................................................. 79
  3.2.7. Semi-structured interviews ...................................................................... 81
  3.2.8. An overview of data analysis..................................................................... 84
3.3. The trustworthiness of the research................................................................. 86
  3.3.1. Credibility.................................................................................................. 86
  3.3.2. Dependability and transparency................................................................. 87
  3.3.3. Confirmability............................................................................................ 87
  3.3.4 Transferability.............................................................................................. 88
3.5. Ethical considerations and limitations of the study ......................................... 88
  3.5.1. Ethical issues.............................................................................................. 89
  3.5.2. Limitations of the study............................................................................. 91
3.6. Summary ........................................................................................................... 93

Chapter 4. Findings and discussion for RQ1: What are the sixth-form student perceptions and experiences of employability in a UK sixth form?
Introduction............................................................................................................ 96
4.1. Theme 1: Employability of post sixth-form student destinations. .................... 97
  4.1.1. Higher education....................................................................................... 97
4.1.2. Higher Apprenticeship and employment.................................................................99
4.1.3. The cost of a degree.................................................................................................101

4.2. Theme 2: Student expectations of being an employee...............................................102
4.2.1. Income.....................................................................................................................103
4.2.2. Job Satisfaction.......................................................................................................103
4.2.3. Promotion................................................................................................................105
4.2.4. Compatibility with a workplace...............................................................................106

4.3. Theme 3: Student personal attributes of employability............................................108
4.3.1. Interaction with workplace colleagues.................................................................108
4.3.2. Being prepared for the workplace as a student......................................................109
4.3.3. Being prepared to act as an agent of change........................................................110

4.4. Summary....................................................................................................................112

Chapter 5. Findings and discussion for RQ2: ‘What role do sixth-form tutors perceive they
have in helping student to develop their employability?’
Introduction .......................................................................................................................114

5.1. Theme 1: Tutor perceptions of the role of the sixth-form tutor ..................................115
5.1.1. The role of a tutor.....................................................................................................115
5.1.2. Tutor agency.............................................................................................................119
5.1.3. The relationship between tutor and student............................................................121

5.2. Theme 2: Tutor perceptions of student readiness to enter the workplace....................122
5.2.1. The limitations of academic qualifications in enabling employability......................122
5.2.2. Escaping the education bubble..............................................................................126

5.3. Theme 3: The potential of sixth-form tutors to support student employability..............127
5.3.1. Tutor development of student employability............................................................128
5.3.2. Other influences on student employability..............................................................130
5.3.3. The preparation of students for entry the workplace..............................................133

5.4. Summary....................................................................................................................135

Chapter 6. Findings and discussion for RQ3: How do students and staff experience the
Futures programme and what impact do they perceive that it has on student employability?
Introduction.......................................................................................................................138

6.1. Theme 1: The link between statutory guidance and the Futures programme.................139
6.1.1. The influence of the Futures programme on student choice of post sixth-form destination ................................................................. 139
6.1.2. The intended extension of the Futures programme ............................. 144
6.2. Theme 2: The contribution to employability of sixth-form work experience ......................................................................................... 148
6.2.1. The perceived benefit of the Futures work experience programme .......... 148
6.2.2. The impact of work experience .......................................................... 151
6.2.3. Partnership with employers .................................................................. 154
6.3. Summary .................................................................................................. 156

Chapter 7. Conclusion

Introduction ........................................................................................................ 158
7.1. The main findings of the research .............................................................. 159
7.1.1. RQ1: What are student perceptions and experiences of employability .......... 159
7.1.2. RQ2: What role do sixth-form tutors perceive they have in helping students to develop their employability? .................................................. 162
7.1.3. RQ3: How do students and staff experience the Futures programme and what impact do they perceive that it has on student employability .......... 165
7.2. Implications .................................................................................................. 168
7.3. Original contribution to knowledge ............................................................. 170
7.4. Suggestions for further research ................................................................. 171
7.5. Reflections on my personal journey through the course of the inquiry .......... 172
7.6. Final thoughts ............................................................................................. 173

List of Tables
1.1. Changes in the industrial source of employment in the UK economy 1960-2011 .......... 10
1.2. Workplace attributes identified by the 2013 CBI survey (2013:33) .............................................. 12
2.1. Summary of attributes of employability ....................................................... 43
2.2. Students achieving 5 GCSEs grades A*-C including Maths and English 2009-2013 .............. 44
2.3. The research questions derived from the literature review ................................. 62
3.1. The four partnership employers interviewed for the pilot study .................. 67
3.2. Employer responses to question 1 of the pilot study ........................................ 68
3.3. Employer responses to question 2 of the pilot study ......................................... 69
3.4. Employer responses to question 3 of the pilot study ......................................... 70
3.5. Employer responses to question 4 of the pilot study........................................71
3.6. The interview sample of sixth-form staff with approximate age to reflect experience.....75
3.7. The interview sample of sixth-form students..........................................................75
3.8. The intended and actual sample of students..........................................................76
3.9. Interview schedule...............................................................................................78
3.10. The process and procedure of data analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006:87)............85
3.11. A relational ethical framework (Flinders 1992)..................................................91
4.1. Emerging themes for RQ1....................................................................................96
5.1. Emerging themes for RQ2..................................................................................114
6.1. Emerging themes for RQ3..................................................................................139

List of Figures
1.1. An example of a student acting as an agent of change from professional experience......19
3.1. The link between interview data and the study......................................................79
4.1. Initial coding of sixth-form student responses for RQ1.........................................96
5.1. Initial coding of sixth-form tutor responses for RQ2............................................114
6.1. Initial coding of data for RQ3.............................................................................138
7.1. Strategy for the development of student employability........................................169

References ..................................................................................................................175

Appendices
Appendix A ..................................................................................................................193
Appendix B ..................................................................................................................193
Appendix C ..................................................................................................................194
Appendix D ..................................................................................................................195
Appendix E ..................................................................................................................196
Appendix F ..................................................................................................................198
Appendix G ..................................................................................................................199
Appendix H ..................................................................................................................200
Appendix J ..................................................................................................................201
Chapter 1: The background to the study

Introduction

The issue of student employability has continued to attract the attention of employers (CBI, 2016) and statutory careers guidance (DfE, 2017). Technical skills are no longer deemed sufficient to enable workplace competency in a UK economy dominated by the service sector, and personal attributes appropriate for the workplace have been recognised as necessary for occupational competency. Although employers have articulated clear expectations of the personal attributes of employability required from their student recruits (see table 1.2.), the Department of Education (DfE) has remained convinced that academic qualifications provide employers with the best indicator of potential student employability (DfE, 2017). The purpose of this study is to explore this apparent contradiction between DfE expectations of students and employer expectations of employees, and fill the gap in knowledge which can enable students to make the transition from being a student to becoming an employee.

The study has adopted a case study approach, investigating student and staff experiences of employability at an English school sixth-form. The outcome of the study is intended to translate student academic achievement into workplace competency through developing student employability.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the study, highlight its significance, and outline how the study will be organised. The first section (1.1.) identifies the issue under investigation, that of student employability. The second section (1.2.) introduces the context of the study: the reason for choosing student employability as a topic for research, a description of the case study school and the Futures programme, and consideration of the contribution of school to lifelong learning. The third section (1.3.) introduces the aims and research questions of the study. The fourth section (1.4.) provides a brief overview of the study’s conceptual framework and the fifth section (1.5.) provides an overview of the study’s methodology. The sixth section (1.6.) reflects on the significance of the inquiry and its outcomes, and the seventh section (1.7.) presents an overview of the thesis.
1.1. The problem of student employability

Student employability has attracted interest from both employers and central government since the de-industrialisation of the UK economy in the 1980s (Ball, 2009). In 1952 the UK manufacturing industry contributed 40% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and sold 25% of the world’s manufacturing exports, however in 2012 the UK manufacturing industry accounted for only 11% and 2% respectively (Skidelski, 2013). As a consequence, the manufacturing industry in the UK has been replaced by the service industry as the primary provider of employment opportunities, as shown in table 1.1, and employer expectations of student recruits have changed to include personal attributes of employability.

Table 1.1: Changes in the industrial source of employment in the UK economy 1961-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Manufacturing Industry %</th>
<th>Service Industry %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(OFFICE OF NATIONAL STATISTICS, 2016)

The shift in employment opportunities reflects the emergence of a global economy, which led Robles to observe that, “the shift from an industrial economy to an information society and an office economy means that many jobs now place an emphasis on integrity, communication, and flexibility” (2012, p. 453). One result of this shift in employment is that employers expect student recruits to the workplace to demonstrate personal attributes of employability (as shown in table 1.2.) when they enter the workplace, in addition to technical competence derived from academic qualifications.

Since the emergence of the service industry as the primary employer, the concept of employability has attracted a great deal of academic interest. This study has adopted one of the three definitions suggested by Harvey (2001) which enables students to be prepared for entry to the workplace for the first time: “The propensity ... to exhibit attributes that employers
anticipate will be necessary for the future effective functioning of their organisation” (p.100). However, compulsory education has continued to emphasise the merits of an academic curriculum (DfE, 2014a). The DfE adopted the recommendations of the Wolf Report’s review of vocational education (2011), which concluded that more reliable and robust qualifications were necessary to provide employers with dependable guidance on the occupational competence of student recruits. The Wolf Report also criticised existing vocational qualifications as, “having little to no labour market value” (p.7), recommending that many were discontinued, although it did recognise that, “the skills developed are only a sub-set of those valued in the labour market (and life)” (p.130).

The emphasis of the Wolf Report on the employment value of academic qualifications failed to convince employers that academic qualifications can lead to occupational competency, without appropriate personal attributes of employability. The 2016 Confederation of British Industry Report, ‘The Right Combination’, complained that:

“Around half of businesses are not satisfied with school leavers work experience (56%) or their skills in communication (50%) analysis (50%) and self-management (48%). Many also reported room for improvement in essential capabilities such as business and customer awareness (69%) … and team working (26%)” (p. 30).

A lack of work readiness of student recruits to the workplace acquired more significance for school sixth-forms after the raising of the school leaving age to 18 in 2015 by the Education and Skills Act (2008). Although some students would continue to leave school at 16 for vocational training or an apprenticeship, more students were likely to enter a sixth-form without the academic background for university entry, and seek employment as their post sixth-form destination. Nevertheless, the extension of the school leaving age was not accompanied by a curriculum inclusion of the development of student employability. The personal attributes expected by employers were clearly outlined in the 2013 CBI report (table 1.2.), however these were not included in the 2014 revised statutory careers guidance (DfE 2014b), except through transmitted information, advice and guidance; whereas Bourdieu (1986) argued that personal attributes are the product of accumulated social and cultural capital (see section 2.1.2).

**Table 1.2: Workplace attributes identified by the 2013 CBI survey (p.33)**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal attributes</th>
<th>Outcomes of personal attributes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Determination through grit resilience, tenacity.</td>
<td>- Finish tasks started and understand value of work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Learn to take positives from failure experienced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Work independently and be solutions focussed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determination through self-control.</td>
<td>- Pay attention and resist distractions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Remember and follow directions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Get to work right away rather than procrastinating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Remain calm even when criticised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Allow others to speak without interruption.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Be eager to explore new things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Ask and answer questions to deepen understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determination through curiosity.</td>
<td>- Actively participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Show enthusiasm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Invigorate others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism through enthusiasm and zest.</td>
<td>- Recognise and show appreciation for others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Recognise and show appreciation for opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism through gratitude.</td>
<td>- Pursue dreams and goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism through confidence and ambition.</td>
<td>- Willing to try new experiences and meet new people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism through creativity.</td>
<td>- Identify and develop new ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional intelligence. through humility.</td>
<td>- Find solution during conflicts with others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional intelligence through respect and good manners.</td>
<td>- Demonstrate respect for feelings of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional intelligence sensitivity to global concerns</td>
<td>- Know when and how to include others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Be polite to adults and peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Be aware of pressing global issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Contribute to leading society.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The difference between employer expectations of student recruits and DfE expectation of school students can be illustrated by the lack of compatibility between the 2013 City and Guilds research into employer opinions of student recruits, and revised statutory careers guidance (DfE, 2014b). The employer sample of the City and Guilds research revealed that, “nearly half (49%) believe young people are leaving education without the right skills because the education system is too focussed on academia” (p.7). In contrast, statutory guidance advised that schools need to provide employers with, “a reliable and accessible source of comparative information on pupil attainment and progress” (DfE, 2014b, p.3).

Given that student applicants have appropriate academic qualifications, employers have come to expect student applicants also possess appropriate personal attributes of employability, even though they are likely to lack experience of the full-time workplace. This led Robles to conclude that personal attributes, “are ranked as number one and are extremely important for potential job hires in many occupations and industries” (2012, p.459). Although the value of personal attributes of employability has been realised for some time (Scott, 1995), compulsory education seems to have shown little understanding of the development of personal attributes of employability. Statutory guidance recommended that, “a range of inspirational role models … can instil resilience, goal setting, hard work and social confidence in pupils, encouraging them to overcome barriers to success” (DfE, 2015a, p.7). However, it seems unlikely that a brief intervention by a role model will enable students to transform their own personal attributes.

Although statutory guidance advised schools that extra-curricular activities could develop personal attributes of employability, such as resilience and grit (DfE, 2017), extra-curricular activities seem unlikely to attract students who do not have sufficient social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). A narrow life experience stemming from disadvantaged socio-economic background arguably means that students are less likely to have acquired the personal characteristics required for interaction with unfamiliar others. In support of this argument, the 2017 report of the Social Mobility Commission advised that, if students from disadvantaged backgrounds were to make a successful transition from education to employment, education policy needs, “to shift focus from qualifications to employability” (p. 67). This argument will be more fully developed in the second chapter of this thesis.

Rather than develop student employability, revised statutory careers guidance (DfE, 2014b) seems to have been more concerned to prevent students becoming NEETS (neither in
education, employment or training). Careers education in schools is assessed on, “success in supporting their pupils to take up education or training which offers good long term prospects,” (DfE, 2017, p.17). Although statutory guidance required schools to track student post sixth-form destinations (DfE, 2014b), it did not expect schools to analyse the extent to which students, as employees, were able to demonstrate employability and sustain employment.

Being able to sustain employment is likely to depend upon the application of the personal attributes of the student recruit to the workplace community of practice (this notion will also be developed later in section 2.1.5.). In making the transition from being a student to becoming an employee the student can expect to act as an agent of change (a concept further developed in section 2.1.3). The student recruit to the workplace cannot expect to rely upon an employer induction programme to make the transition since programmes tend to provide more procedurally focussed work-related information. According to Arachchige, the employer induction programme, “provides newcomers with basic knowledge about organisational values, the principles, the roles and how to read between the lines that allow them to effectively collaborate with other employees and face the external environment” (2014, pp.7-8). However, students in their first full-time employment are unlikely to have had previous experience of, ‘reading between the lines’ or to appreciate the implicit meaning of an induction programme, and they may be unable to interact with other employees in order to ‘collaborate’ with them.

Although employers have become involved in school education with the intention of better preparing students for employment, they have tended to rely upon two activities which arguably have very little impact on student employability. The 2016 CBI/Pearson ‘Education and Skills survey’ found that, “among employers with links to schools and colleges, the two most common forms of support by far are offering work experience placements (80%) and careers advice and talks (80%)” (p.38). However, during a brief work experience placement, the student remains a student, while careers advice talks transmit information rather than develop student employability.

Employers have also funded, (and continue to fund) charitable organisations intended to contribute to the delivery of secondary education. The Teach First organisation was launched by employers in 2002 as a charitable organisation to improve the prospects of students from poor backgrounds, and it has made a significant contribution to inner city secondary education
in the recruitment and training of teachers, and senior managers. However, Teach First found that academic qualifications did not necessarily translate into employability. The 2015 Teach First Report concluded that, “the vision of 21st century work literacy is far from a reality for many young people – especially those from low income backgrounds” (p.13). Although the report recognised a deficit of work literacy, it did not suggest a means of developing student employability, other than the transmission of social capital from teacher to student.

It was the difficulty of making the transition from being a student to becoming an employee, before personal attributes were regarded as a necessary supplement to academic qualifications, which encouraged the choice of employability as a topic for this study. The next section examines the past and present context of the study.

1.2. The study in context

The need to develop student employability existed prior to the emergence of a post-industrial economy. As a sixth-form student in the early 1970s, I would have benefitted a great deal from the intervention of a vocational education programme which recognised the significance of personal attributes of employability. Since my personal attributes of employability stemmed from being the only child of a one-parent family, from a lower working class background, I found the transition from formal education to a professional career to be challenging. Although I gained a government funded place at a Direct Grant school, and progressed from there to university with a full grant, I found that my academic qualifications were not sufficient for a comfortable passage into my preferred career. Involvement in extra-curricular activities at school and university did not enhance my social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to the extent that I could comfortably interact with unfamiliar others in the workplace.

My school sixth-form did not provide a programme of vocational education and students tended to be advised and guided by their families. I received little careers guidance at university, since my redbrick university assumed that a careers convention in the 3rd Year was sufficient to prepare students for their choice of career. Although I eventually decided upon a career in teaching, my teacher training college assumed that I knew the expectations of school appointment panels. I was only able to start my teaching career because of accidental circumstance, rather than design. Having acquired a teaching post, it was my enthusiasm for
contributing to the education of young people from a non-professional background, rather than sharing a common purpose with other members of staff, which enabled me to identify with the school community of practice (see section 2.1.5.). Fortunately, my choice of school provided a compatible workplace; otherwise I may not have been ready to act as an agent of change (see section 2.1.3).

The school where I spent my entire teaching career (known from this point as The Old School) provided the case study sixth-form for this research (see section 3.2.1). At the time of the research The Old School was a non-selective, single sex, inner city school with a multi-ethnic intake of 150 students in each Year. The school was assessed as ‘Outstanding’ by its 2015 Ofsted Report (Office of Standards in Education) after achieving impressive GCSE, A-level and BTEC examination results (Appendix B), supplemented by a wide range of extra-curricular activities. This level of achievement was the product of a committed teaching staff and clarity of purpose from the senior management team, which enabled the realisation of student potential.

The Old School had been able to maintain an independent sixth-form until it joined a local sixth-form consortium in 2004 to expand its curriculum provision and offer an attractive destination for GCSE students. A sixth-form tends to be an appealing proposition for schools since existing academic provision can be extended for an existing student body without a significant investment in additional resources. The school can also benefit from additional funding, which is dependent upon the number of enrolled students (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2015). The number of sixth-form students on roll can be increased by attracting students from other schools and is likely to increase with the raising of the school leaving age to 18 (Education Act 2008),

The research cohort for the study was the 2015-16 Year 12 intake of The Old School. There were 108 students in the intake, an increase of 33 students on the Year 13 intake (Appendices A and E). The post sixth-form destinations of the Year 13 students over the last 5 years showed an increase in students securing a university place from 35 (56%) to 57 (75%); however, the number of students choosing to move into employment, apprenticeship or take a gap year also rose from 9 (14%) to 17 (23%) over the same five year period (Appendix E). These changes suggest a sixth-form geared towards university entry, but which could expect to cater for a growing interest in alternative post sixth-form destinations.
The sixth-form students were likely to rely upon the sixth-form staff to support their career aspirations. Out of the total number of 183 students in the 2015-16 sixth-form intakes (Appendix A), 36% were entitled to free school meals, suggesting a significant number of disadvantaged students. The gender divide was dominated by male students (Appendix A), however this imbalance was unlikely to result in biased sixth-form student since both the Head of Sixth-form and the Futures programme co-ordinator were female, and 50% of sixth-form tutors were female (see table 3.6.). The ethnic background of the students was very varied, (Appendix A) reflecting the intake of an inner city school, and this meant that students did not lack self-esteem through ethnic minority status. Although the students of The Old School sixth-form did not lack career aspiration or academic ambition, their socio-economic background meant that many relied upon the teaching staff to direct their learning and introduce them to their career potential.

The sixth-form Futures vocational education programme was introduced in 2012 in response to the transfer of responsibility for careers education from local authorities to schools (DfE, 2011b). The programme was built on existing support for students, which took them through the UCAS procedure for university entry, and included a discrete Careers Practitioner responsible for tracking post-sixth form student destinations. The programme satisfied statutory careers guidance (Appendix C), which was included in the Ofsted assessment of schools (2014b). A co-ordinator was appointed to establish links with employers, and introduce meaningful work experience placements for BTEC students in preparation for a post-sixth form destination, which might include employment.

The Futures programme followed statutory careers advice (2014b) in providing careers information, advice and guidance (Appendices D-H). The programme initially engaged Year 12 students in weekly sixth-form assemblies, with visiting speakers invited to introduce a wide range of career opportunities. A monthly Futures bulletin (Appendix G) was circulated to all students to introduce them to opportunities outside school which could add to their social and cultural experience. In the last week of June the programme ran an annual, week long Year 12 workshop which was intended to provide each student with an opportunity to choose a post sixth-form destination. The outcome of the week was that each student should identify a destination, supported by a C.V. (curriculum vitae) and personal statement (Appendix H). One
member of the Futures team then supported students who wanted to apply for university until they had secured the offer of a place, while those students who sought other destinations were referred to the programme co-ordinator for further support.

The Futures programme also introduced meaningful work experience, which was included in statutory advice (2015b) rather than statutory guidance (DfE, 2014b). All Year 12 students had the opportunity of applying for placements which were organised with partnership employers, promoted in sixth-form assemblies, and advertised in the Futures Bulletin (Appendix G). Applicants went through a formal process of application, organised by the employer or the Futures team, to replicate recruitment in the real world. In the academic year 2015/16, 64% of Year 12 students completed a placement.

The Futures programme incorporated an Access pilot scheme (2014) intended to support disadvantaged students to progress to the sixth-form and identify an appropriate post sixth-form destination. However, many other students were also dependent upon the staff providing them with an introduction to post sixth-form destinations, a dependency which stemmed from pedagogic practice which enabled them to achieve their academic potential. As a Head of Year I found that I could support many students by encouraging them to make an adjustment to their social construct of reality, (see section 2.1.1.) which enabled them to recognise the social and cultural expectations of the school. Below is one memorable example from my own professional experience (figure 1.1.) which demonstrated that, given appropriate support and understanding, students could act as agents of change (see section 2.1.3.). As Wearmouth and Glyn concluded, a change in student behaviour is the consequence of the student having the opportunity to be, “an active agent in his/her own learning, and both learning and behaviour are situated, dynamic and interactive between students and learning environment” (2004, p.1). Enabling the point of change depends upon recognising that each student has the potential to shake off behaviour which is not conducive to learning.

Figure 1.1. An example of a student acting as an agent of change.

From when he first entered school, James (a pseudonym) challenged school uniform regulations and the authority of teachers. He was unsure of his identity and did not have the social skills to recognise school expectations. Rather than dismiss him as an irritant, I was able to support him,
if only by being on hand to open the bike shed for him at the end of school. However, he was introduced to rugby union at school, and he discovered that, by achieving certain GCSE grades in school, he could gain entry to a Further Education college and the opportunity to train at a Premiership rugby union club. Once motivated, James engaged with the school, and he achieved the GCSE results he required. If James had experienced rejection by the school, it is likely that he would have been unwilling to include school expectations in his social construct of reality (see chapter 2).

Choosing The Old School sixth-form as a case study provided ease of access to students and staff, but I found it difficult to adopt the perspective of a detached researcher. As a previous Head of Sixth-Form, I had faced the challenge of maintaining the integrity of a small sixth-form, to the extent of teaching 4 A-level subjects. I initially considered the introduction of the Futures vocational education programme in 2012 to be an example of The Old School enhancing its sixth-form curriculum to benefit its student intake, rather than a response to the transfer of careers education to schools (Education Act, 2011). I had also been a Head of Year to most of the male students, and a colleague of many of the sixth-form staff I interviewed to collect research data. Nevertheless, at the time of the interviews I was no longer a member of the pastoral team or a colleague of the staff, and I had not been involved in the sixth-form for a considerable time. The issues of being an insider/outsider researcher, briefly raised here, are described and discussed in more detail in the methods chapter.

However, The Old School sixth-form was chosen as a case study because it had four characteristics which pointed to its potential to develop student employability:

1. A sixth-form Futures vocational education programme which was designed to satisfy revised statutory careers guidance (see Appendix C).

2. An academic performance which meant that resources were available for allocation to the Futures programme, rather than being allocated to improving academic performance (see Appendix B).

3. A sixth-form student intake which was likely to rely upon the support and guidance of the Futures programme for an appropriate post sixth-form destination.
4. A geographical location which enabled the Futures programme to provide of meaningful work experience placements (Appendix F).

Despite the potential of The Old School’s sixth-form as a case study, the contribution of school to student employability seemed to be threatened by the introduction of the Education Reform Act (1988), which led schools to focus on academic performance. Schools found themselves assessed through tangible outcomes, and Freebody warned that, "the vocabulary of performance measurement, competition for resources and corporate managerial responsibility ... (is) increasingly applied to those institutions explicitly charged with meritocratic versions of equity and redistribution" (2003, p.viii). The Education Funding Agency (2017) seemed to confirm this warning in considering a sixth-form unsatisfactory if:

1. Its academic or applied general value added score is below the threshold set by the department.
2. Its value added score is statistically significantly below the national average, for example, both its upper and lower confidence intervals are below zero.

This emphasis on academic achievement led Schuetze and Casey to argue that, “schools are increasingly prioritising standardised qualifications and preparing workers for new ways of working” (2006, p.282). It seemed that the impact of the neo-liberal state on education would encourage schools to ignore the personal attributes of individual students and focus resources on raising their aggregate examination performance in order to provide students with the academic qualifications considered necessary for employment in a global economy (Harvey, 2006).

Nevertheless, Braithwaite argued that, “for children whose families lack endowments of social and cultural capital, we rely upon state funded education systems to compensate” (2004, p.89). All students are likely to benefit from being introduced in school to a strategy which can enable them to act as an agent of change (see section 2.1.3.). My professional experience convinced me that school contributes to student personal development through the interaction between student and teacher, which can include preparation for student entry into the full-time workplace for the first time. Although academic qualifications provide students with an entry
to preferred employment, Sen argued that, “we must go beyond the notion of human capital, after acknowledging its relevance and reach. The broadening that is needed is additional and cumulative, rather than bringing an alternative to the ‘human capital’ approach” (1997, p.1960). In addition to pedagogic practice which enables students to achieve academic qualifications, addressing student employability can enable students to translate those qualifications into occupational competency.

My professional experience suggested that the effective delivery of a school curriculum relies upon a positive interaction between student and teacher, and this can also develop student employability through an extension of that interaction, without the need for curriculum reform. Although Keep suggested that further change within the formal education sector may not have much real impact, “if many of the real reasons why vocational study does not lead to the expected outcomes are located within the labour market and its wage and progression structures” (2012a, p.318), the labour market in unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. The formal education sector bears a moral responsibility to develop student employability in order that students can meet the expectations of employers when they enter the workplace for the first time.

Reliance upon statutory careers guidance has failed to satisfy employer expectations of student recruits (CBI, 2016). The argument can be made that employers are unlikely to declare their expectations satisfied because they want the taxpayer to continue to fund the development of student employability, so that the supply of employable students is greater than the demand (Keep, 2012b). However, whatever the merits of this argument, it is possible to resolve what Keep describes as, “the perennial issue of ....employer satisfaction with the employability or work-readiness of young people entering the labour market” (p.363), without reliance on statutory guidance or without employers changing their expectations. Student employability can be developed through an extension of the existing school curriculum by providing students with a strategy which can enable them to join the workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5.) in order to demonstrate occupational competency, and sustain employment.

The next section introduces the research aims and questions which address the development of sixth-form student employability to enable student recruits to the workplace for the first time to meet employer expectations.
1.3. Research aims and questions

The purpose of the research is to fill the knowledge gap which seems to exist in enabling the sixth-form student to make the transition to become an employee. This purpose has been divided into three aims:

1. To identify elements of a strategy which will enable each student to be ready to enter the workplace for the first time and demonstrate occupational competency.
2. To relate a strategy for the development of sixth-form student employability to student perception and experience of employability.
3. To advise how the development of student employability can be delivered.

Without the development of student employability, sixth-form student academic qualifications alone, albeit enhanced by H.E., are unlikely to translate into occupational competency. The social and cultural capital (discussed later in section 2.1.2) acquired from being a student is likely to be different to the collective social and cultural capital of workplace colleagues. Unless the student is able to become an employee through the agency of change (discussed later in section 2.1.3), he/she will rely upon a random compatibility between his/her social and cultural capital and that of the workplace in order to demonstrate occupational competency. Although the self-efficacy of the student is likely to determine the extent to which he/she can construct a vocational habitus (discussed later in section 2.1.4) to join the workplace community of practice (discussed later in section 2.1.5), the student recruit can enter the workplace with a strategy which will enable him/her to become an employee and meet the expectations of the employer.

A strategy for becoming an employee is explored in the first section of the literature review based upon the conceptual framework of social constructionism, operationalised by four related concepts. The second and third sections of the literature review investigate sixth-form student employability and the contribution of sixth-form education to student employability. The three research questions emerged from the second and third sections:

1. What are the sixth form student perceptions and experiences of employability in an English school sixth-form?
2. What role do sixth-form tutors perceive that they have in helping students to develop their employability?

3. How do students and staff experience the case study sixth-form Futures programme, and what impact do they perceive it has on student capacity for employability?

The first research question examines the meaning sixth-form students derive from their knowledge and experience of employability, providing the starting point for the development of student employability. The second research question examines sixth-form tutor perceptions of being a tutor, since the development of student employability is intended to be delivered by sixth-form staff. The third research question considers the contribution of secondary school education to student employability, especially the case study sixth-form’s Futures programme which reflects statutory careers guidance (DfE, 2014b) and includes work experience. The next section provides an overview of the conceptual framework for the research.

1.4. An overview of the conceptual framework

This is a brief overview of the study’s conceptual framework, which is further developed in the next chapter. The overall theoretical framework of the study is constructivism, with social constructionism as its core concept, interlaced with the concepts of cultural and social capital, the agency of change, vocational habitus, and the community of practice. Social constructionism recognises that knowledge and social context are interlinked. If a student is to make the transition from being a student to becoming an employee, he/she can expect to rely upon the meaning derived from the social situation of the workplace in order to interact with unfamiliar work colleagues and adapt to unfamiliar work practices.

Social constructionism argues that personal attributes stem from each student’s cognitive construct of social reality, under the influence of social context. In the study, each sixth-form student is assumed to have an individualised construction of his/her employability, and each sixth-form member of staff to have an individualised construction of his/her role as a form tutor. Nevertheless, individual constructions can be categorised in collective themes since students and tutors share the common context of the sixth-form community of practice and external economic conditions of employability.
Making the transition from being a student to becoming an employee presents student recruits to the workplace with a significant challenge, and it is the capacity to address that challenge which is likely to determine occupational competency (Bandura et. al., 2001). The student enters the workplace for the first time with a fund of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and is likely to rely upon self-efficacy (Lüftenegger et. al., 2012) to interact with unfamiliar work colleagues and adapt to unfamiliar work practices. Although the major form of institutional investment in cultural capital is formal education, measured by quality and duration (Bourdieu, 1986), student recruits can expect to expand their social capital to join the unfamiliar workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5.). In defining social capital, Moore argued that the major form of social capital is, “appropriate forms of sociability that entail reciprocal obligations (e.g. in returning favours)” (Moore 2004, p.446), which are necessary to enable interaction between work colleagues.

When entering a workplace for the first time, the student recruit can expect to act as an agent of change through applying his/her personal attributes to construct a vocational habitus (Colley et. al. 2003). This construction would enable the student recruit to join the workplace community of practice and learn occupational competency through the concept of situated learning (Lave, 1991). According to Omidva and Kislov, “people learn through co-participation in the shared practices of the ‘lived-in’ world; knowledge production is inseparable from the situated, contextual, social engagement with these practices” (2014, p. 266-67). Therefore it can be argued that students can learn to be an employee when situated in the workplace.

Although a brief work experience placement or a part-time job can provide the student with experience of the workplace, the student remains a student, rather than having to construct a vocational habitus (Colley et.al., 2003) to become an employee. In her consideration of habitus, Reay argued that Bourdieu considered habitus to be inscribed in the biological body of the individual, (2004, p. 433), however this definition suggests that the student recruit to the workplace cannot escape his/her social positioning. The study argues that the student can exercise self-efficacy (Pinquart et. al., 2003) to free himself/herself from existing functioning (Sen 2005), in order to construct a vocational habitus. Although Reay concluded that,” choices are bounded by the framework of opportunities and constraints the person finds himself/herself, in his/her external circumstances” (p.435), the concept of functioning (Sen, 2005) is likely to result in a change of identity through the acquisition of other personal
attributes (Moore, 2004, p.446). The next section provides a brief overview of the study’s methodology.

1.5. An overview of the methodology

The methodology of the study recognises a social constructionist epistemology, investigating the individual perceptions of students and staff within the social context of the case study sixth-form. The research relied upon qualitative data collected from a purposive sample of staff and students which reflected sixth-form practice. The research data were collected from semi-structured interviews which allowed staff (n=12) and students (n=18) to express their views and opinions. The interview data were coded and the codes collated into themes, which emerged from the coding process, to answer each of the three research questions which emerged from the literature review:

RQ1: What are the sixth-form student perceptions and experiences of employability at an English school sixth-form?

RQ2: What role do sixth-form tutors perceive that they have in helping students to develop their employability?

RQ3: How do students and staff experience the Futures programme, and what impact do they perceive it has on student capacity for employability?

Having been an insider gave me access to staff and students of The Old School sixth-form, but retirement allowed me the detachment of being an outsider when I conducted the interviews. Although my interviews and analysis of the research data were informed by my knowledge and experience of having been a practitioner, a pilot study enabled me to acknowledge the perspective of the employer. All these issues will be discussed more fully in the third chapter. The next section identifies the significance and outcomes of the study.

1.6. The significance and outcomes of the study

The significance of this study is that it fills the knowledge gap of how a student may be able to adapt more successfully to the workplace in order to become an employee. Neither statutory guidance nor employer sponsored organisations appear to have been able to prepare students
successfully for entry to a workplace for the first time. Statutory careers guidance required schools to identify and support post sixth-form destinations for its students (DfE, 2014b), but it relied upon transmitted knowledge to develop student employability. On the other hand, employers have expressed significant dissatisfaction with the work readiness of student recruits (CBI, 2016), but they have been unable develop student employability through direct involvement in secondary education (Teach First, 2015).

Student employability relies upon the supplementation of academic qualifications by personal attributes which enable the student recruit to interact with unfamiliar work colleagues and adapt to unfamiliar work practices. Transmitted knowledge of appropriate personal attributes is unlikely to transform attributes which have developed over time in response to life experience. Since the study argues that employability depends upon situated learning (Lave, 1991) in the workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5), it also argues that the student can only become an employee when he/she ceases to be a student.

If students are not to rely upon a random choice of a workplace which is compatible with their social and cultural capital, and avoid social positioning when they enter employment, they can expect to act as agents of change (see section 2.1.3) on entry to their first workplace, in order to become an employee. In providing students with a strategy for becoming an employee, this study fills a perceived gap in vocational education which could prevent students from translating the technical knowledge gained from academic qualifications into occupational competency. Since a strategy for developing student employability is only likely to be feasible if it accommodates existing sixth-form practice, statutory careers guidance, and employer expectations, the recommended strategy is an extension of existing pedagogic practice intended to address employer concerns over the work readiness of student recruits.

1.7. An overview of the study

The study is organised over six chapters following this introduction. The second chapter provides a literature review, which first explores the conceptual framework of the study, the concept of social constructionism (2.1.1.), and four related operational concepts: social and cultural capital (2.1.2), the agency of change, (2.1.3) vocational habitus (2.1.4.) and community of practice (2.1.5). The second section of the chapter (2.2.) investigates the importance of
personal attributes of employability (2.2.1), and the significance of the student achieving a sense of belonging to a workplace as an employee (2.2.2). The first research question emerged from these two sections (see below). The third section (2.3.) considers the contribution of school to student employability (2.3.1.) and the benefit of introducing employability mentors (2.3.2.) The second research question emerged from these two parts (see below). The third section considers the extent to which the Futures programme satisfies statutory guidance (2.3.3.) and the benefit of work experience placements introduced by the Futures programme (2.3.4.). The third research question emerged from these two parts (see below)

The first section of the third chapter (3.1) identifies the paradigm of the study. The second section (3.2.) explains the research methods and design of the study: the case study, the pilot study, the bias of the researcher, using a purposeful sample of students and staff, the collection of data, the use of semi-structured interviews, and an overview of the data analysis The third section (3.3.) considers the trustworthiness of the research through four guidelines: credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. The fourth section (3.4.) examines the ethical considerations and the limitations of the study. The final section (3.5) provides a summary of the chapter.

Each of the next three chapters investigates one research question, providing examples of the findings and a discussion of those findings. The data relevant to each question were coded and collated into themes which emerged from the coding process:

**RQ1:** What are the sixth-form student perceptions and experiences of employability at an English school sixth-form?

1. Employability of post sixth-form destinations (section 4.1.).
2. Student expectations of being an employee (section 4.2.).
3. Student personal attributes of employability (section 4.3.).

**RQ2:** What role do sixth-form tutors perceive that they have in helping students to develop their employability?

1. Tutor perceptions of being a sixth-form tutor (section 5.1.)
2. Tutor perceptions of student readiness to enter the workplace (section 5.2.).
3. The potential of the tutor to develop student employability (section 5.3.).
RQ3: How do students and staff experience the Futures programme, and what impact do they perceive it has on student capacity for employability?

1. The link between statutory careers guidance and Futures programme (section 6.1).
2. The contribution of work experience to student employability (section 6.2.).

The final chapter provides a conclusion to the study. The first part (7.1.) presents a summary of the findings and discussion of research and discussion. The second section (7.2.) suggests six implications for the development of sixth-form student employability. The third section (7.3.) highlights the original theoretical and professional contribution of knowledge made by the thesis. The fourth section (7.4.) makes three suggestions for further research which would extend the thesis. The fifth section (7.5.) explores my journey though the course of the study and the final section (7.6.) offers some final thoughts on student employability. The next chapter is a literature review which was prompted by the pilot study (see section 3.2.2.).

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Introduction

Given that the student recruit has appropriate academic qualifications for entry to a preferred career, the literature review investigates a constructivist approach to student employability in the workplace. Whereas a logical positivist approach suggests that student recruits can enter the workplace with the knowledge of how to apply their personal attributes to demonstrate occupational competency, constructivism argues that the application of appropriate personal attributes can only be known through the student recruit’s interaction with work colleagues, and adaptation to the practices of the workplace (Young and Collin, 2004). The study has
adopted the concept of social constructionism (see 2.1.1.) within the constructivist family, emphasising the influence of social context on the individual construction of knowledge. This concept also informs the study’s research methodology (which is further discussed in Chapter 3).

The first part of the literature review investigates the concept of social constructivism (2.1.1.), and four related concepts which enable the student recruit to make the transition from being a student to becoming an employee. The student recruit enters the full-time workplace for the first time with a fund of cultural and social capital (2.1.2.), and can then expect to act as an agent of change (2.1.3.) to use that fund of capital in order to interact with unfamiliar work colleagues and adapt to unfamiliar work practices. The construction of an appropriate vocational habitus (2.1.4) can enable the student to enter the workplace community of practice (2.1.5.) and demonstrate occupational competency.

The second section of the literature review investigates student employability, which is predicated on one of the three definitions of employability proposed by Harvey (2001), the extent to which students exhibit personal attributes which employers anticipate will benefit their organisation. The review examines personal attributes of employability (2.2.1.) and the creation of a sense of belonging to the workplace (2.2.2.). However, the review does not investigate the relevance of the sixth-form academic curriculum to student employability, since it was unlikely change (Education Funding Agency, 2017); nor does it investigate the economic context of student employability, since the economy is unlikely to change to accommodate student recruits to the workplace. The first research question emerged from the first two parts of this section:

RQ1: What are the sixth-form student perceptions and experiences of employability in an English school sixth-form?

The third section of the literature review ties student employability to existing sixth-form practice by investigating the contribution of school to student employability (2.3.1.) and the potential for the introduction of employability mentors (2.3.2.). The second research question emerged from these two parts of the third section:
**RQ2:** What role does sixth-form staff perceive that they have in helping to develop student employability?

The third part of this section examines the extent to which the Futures programme was designed to satisfy statutory careers guidance (2.3.3.), and the final section considers the impact of meaningful work experience initiated by the programme to introduce students to the workplace (2.3.4.) The third research question emerged from these two parts of the third section:

**RQ3:** How do students and staff experience the Futures programme and what impact do they perceive it has on the student capacity for employability?

The literature review does not investigate student employability as a contribution to lifelong learning because the study is concerned with a particular defining moment, the entry of a student recruit to the workplace for the first time, rather than the development of employability over time (European Commission, 2012).

### 2.1. The study’s conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of the study is underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm of constructivism (see 2.1.1.), which argues that knowledge is created from the construction of the mind as meaning is derived from social experience (Maines, 2000). Constructivism is an umbrella term for variations in the construction of knowledge on a spectrum from the individual cognition to the influence of social context. The conceptual framework of the study adopts the constructivist concept of social constructionism, which emphasises that social and psychological worlds are made real (constructed) through social processes and interaction (Young and Collin, 2004). This concept relates to the definition of employability (Harvey, 2001) adopted by the study, with the student recruit demonstrating employability through the social process of interacting with unfamiliar work colleagues and adapting to unfamiliar work practices in order to satisfy employer expectations.

Social constructionism is examined in more detail in the first part of this section (2.1.1.). The remaining four parts of the section identify four concepts which, it is argued, recognise that
becoming an employee is an active process of change which stems from participation in the organisation of work. Each student enters the workplace with a fund of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) inherited from previous and present social experience (2.1.2.). On entering the workplace, the student recruit is introduced to a new social experience which provides new social meaning, adding to his/her cultural and social capital. This expansion of experience leads the student recruit to act as an agent of change (Sen, 2005), exhibiting conduct which reflects the meaning derived from the new social reality of the workplace (2.1.3.). The student recruit can expect to construct a vocational habitus (Colley et. al. 2003) in order to be recognised as contributing to the organisation of work (2.1.4.). Recognition as a work colleague enables the student recruit to join the workplace community of practice (Lave, 1991), belong to the workplace (2.1.5.), and demonstrate occupational competency.

2.1.1. Social constructionism

In distinguishing between constructivism and social constructionism, Young and Collin argue that constructivism, “focuses on meaning making and the constructing of the social and psychological worlds through individual, cognitive processes,” whereas social constructionism, “emphasizes that the social and psychological worlds are made real (constructed) through social processes and interaction,” (2004, p 375). The study has adopted the perspective of social constructionism, which implies that student recruits to the workplace create knowledge of how to become an employee through individual and collective actions in the workplace (Andrews, 2012).

Sixth-form students create knowledge of being a student through interacting with sixth-form staff and other students, and belonging to a social reality which recognises that academic achievement is the purpose of the sixth-form and a measure of student accomplishment. However this reality does not include personal attributes appropriate to employability, since these are dependent upon the social reality created in the workplace. The study argues that employability is an active process, described by Blumer as a, “shared or common response, signification and representational processes that underlie human conduct,” (1969 p.2). Consequently, the study argues that students cannot demonstrate employability through transmitted knowledge from the information, advice and guidance advised by statutory careers guidance (DfE 2014b).
Unlike constructivism, Young and Collin argue that social constructionism, “does more than say that something is socially constructed: it points to the historical and cultural location of that construction,” (2004, p.383). Personal attributes of employability relate to the meaning derived by the student recruit from being an employee, but they are also influenced by the past social experience of the student recruit. The construction of an appropriate vocational habitus (see 2.1.4.) can enable the student to belong to the workplace community of practice (see 2.1.5), while recognising that the student recruit brings to the workplace a habitus (Bourdieu, 1986) which does not include experience of being an employee. If the student recruit finds that an appropriate vocational habitus is incompatible with the meaning derived from previous social experience, he/she is likely to search for another workplace (Wolf Report, 2011), unless he/she is prepared to act as an agent of change (see section 2.1.3.)

Knowledge of appropriate attributes of employability is seen to depend upon interaction with unfamiliar work colleagues and adaptation to unfamiliar work practices rather than individual cognition. According to Gasper, “knowledge in some area is the product of our social practices and institutions, or of the interactions and negotiations between relevant social groups” (1999, p. 855). The sixth-form student recruit to the workplace has knowledge of being a sixth-form student derived from the social experience and belonging to a sixth-form community of practice, and can expect to negotiate entry to the workplace community of practice though recognising the expectations of colleagues and workplace practices. Becoming an employee introduces the student recruit to additional social meaning from the workplace, which each student recruit is expected to assimilate within his/her existing knowledge of being a student to develop an identity as an employee.

Students may have been informed of appropriate personal attributes of employability before they first enter the full-time workplace, but being able to demonstrate those personal attributes in the social context of the workplace would seem to depend upon self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), rather than pre-existing knowledge. Self-efficacy has been linked to resilience (Bender and Ingram, 2018) and both seem to stem from previous social experience. Resilience in employment is seen to be a key personal attribute (table 1.2.) but it is arguably developed from birth (Bowlby 1988) and contributes to self-efficacy. Since the student recruit is unlikely to be able to transform personal attributes at the point of entry to the workplace, the application of existing personal attributes is likely to determine the extent to which he/she can join the
workplace community of practice (section 2.1.5). Even if a student recruit to the workplace is able to demonstrate resilience and other appropriate attributes, he/she can expect to go through a process of a change, from being a student to becoming an employee.

The reliance of revised statutory careers guidance (DfE 2014b) on the transmission of knowledge of personal attributes of employability assumes that becoming an employee is an objective social reality, and can be learnt in a similar fashion to academic knowledge. Social constructionism recognises that the employability of the student recruit to the workplace depends upon self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). The relationship between academic qualifications, which provide technical knowledge, and personal attributes was expressed by Bourdieu (1986) through his observation that academic qualifications are embodied in the student (see section 2.1.2.).

The motivation to act as an agent of change can be provided by a preferred career narrative. According to Savickas individuals can construct a career narrative which, “comprehends the vocational self and shapes the further elaboration of this self-conception in the work world,” (2001, p.315). However, constructing a career narrative through cognitive processes rather than through interaction with the workplace can lead to the student recruit being detached from the workplace community of practice, (see 2.1.5.).

The student recruit cannot anticipate the impact of the workplace which results from pursuit of a preferred career (Lindfors et.al. 2014). The UK Commission for Education and Skills (UKCES) found that, “the most commonly cited reason for education leavers of all types being poorly prepared for work was that new recruits lacked experience of the working world or experience of life in general” (2014b, p.89). Since student recruit enters the full-time workplace for the first time, he/she can only rely upon experience of being a student. In order to become an employee, all students can expect to act as agents of change. The next section of the theoretical framework considers the nature of the student’s attributes which he/she brings to the workplace.

### 2.1.2. Cultural and social capital

In order to avoid categorising people’s personal attributes as middle or working class, Bourdieu introduced and developed the concepts of cultural and social capital (Davey, 2009). Cultural
capital was expressed through linguistic and symbolic capital, which included education measured by quantity and duration (Bourdieu, 1986). The sixth-form student will enter employment having invested in acquiring cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications, especially if delayed by entry to university. However, occupational competency is dependent upon interaction with work colleagues through the application of personal attributes. This was recognised by Bourdieu through the concept of social capital, “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group,” (p.286). The student recruit can expect to use his/her fund of cultural and social capital to adapt to the workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5.). The concept of habitus was used by Bourdieu to explain how practice was generated where groups of individuals share similar stocks of economic, cultural and social capital (Davey, 2009).

The concept of habitus can be seen as fastening the identity of the student to being a student, and the identity of the employee to being an employee. The combination of being a student recruit to the workplace, academic qualifications, and the social situation of the workplace (i.e. field) can enable the student to act as an agent of change to become an employee. Bourdieu (1984) mapped this out into a formula that illustrated the connection: habitus x capital + field = practice (p.101). The habitus of the student is greatly enhanced by the cultural capital of academic qualification and when this combination is added to the field, or practice of the workplace, the student can then demonstrate the practice of an employee.

The concept of habitus can be applied whether or not the social and cultural capital of the student recruit is compatible with the social situation of the workplace (Davey, 2009 p.283). When the student enters the workplace for the first time, appropriate academic qualifications confer institutionalised recognition that the student has the potential to contribute to the organisation of work. However, Bourdieu (1986) argued that academic qualifications are embodied in the student, and that the student recruit relies upon inherited cultural capital, accumulated as social capital, to adapt to the workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5.). The concept of habitus enables the student recruit to respond to the workplace to create the habitus of an employee (Reay 2004, p.435).
The increasing participation of both middle-class and working-class students in H.E., when it became more available in the 1950s and 1960s, led Goldthorpe (1996) to reject Bourdieu’s explanation of the impact of inherited social and cultural capital. However the value of a university degree depends upon its use. According to Bourdieu the value of cultural capital, “exists by and for the perception or, more precisely, by or for those who perceive it, and can perceive it, and make it exist as such only because they are endowed with adequate categories of perception” (1999, p.336). Without appropriate social capital to join a workplace community of practice which recognises its value, a university degree is likely to attract little recognition. My experience of joining the civil service after teacher training college tended to support Bourdieu’s proposition that, “the economic and social yield of qualifications depends upon the social capital, again inherited, which can be used to back it up,” (1986, p. 83).

Being perceived as a work colleague introduces the student recruit to another cultural reality and adds to the student’s existing fund of social capital; Bourdieu (1986) argued that the volume of social capital possessed by a given agent depends upon the size of network connections. According to Hirtle, “learners actively construct knowledge in a social context ... it provides not only an optimal learning environment but the potential of transforming the learner’s cultural reality” (1996, p.91). However the construction of an appropriate workplace habitus is a particular challenge for students who aspire to social mobility, but have a narrow range of network connections.

The 2014 report of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission highlighted a significant improvement in the GCSE results of students entitled to free school meals in Inner London, and to a lesser extent in Manchester and Birmingham, (p. 6), which enabled these students to enter Further Education. Although these students may have subsequently have become the first person in their families to enter H.E., this progression did not necessarily prepare students to enter a workplace which reflected their preferred career. The 2017 Social Mobility Commission report advised that, “education policy needed to shift from qualifications to employability if students from disadvantaged backgrounds, with limited social and cultural capital, were to benefit from social mobility through employment,”(p.67). However, the Education Funding Agency (2017) suggested that a shift in education policy is unlikely to occur in the foreseeable future. In order to achieve resonance between personal social and cultural capital, and the
requirements of the workplace (Ng and Feldman, 2007) each student recruit to the workplace can expect to act as an agent of change.

2.1.3. The agency of change

Making the transition from being a student to becoming an employee depends upon the student acting as an agent of change, but effective agency depends upon adopting an appropriate means of change. Cognitive change (MacNamara, 2009) assumes that students are able to exercise a high level of self-awareness, whereas Sen (2005) suggests that individuals are free to change to the extent that, “a person is free to choose particular levels of functionings” (2005, p.155). In their consideration of Sen’s theory of human capability, Galliot and Graham observed that ‘function’ (what the student is able to be and do) requires a level of capability that is neither equally distributed nor innate” (2004, p.275). Each student recruit to the workplace is unlikely to have an equal and innate capacity to act as an agent of change. This can be a distinct disadvantage to those students who have limited social and cultural capital, despite their academic qualifications. However, preparation for entry to the workplace can make students ready to make the transition to becoming an employee.

Without being prepared to act as an agent of change, the capacity of each student to function as an employee is likely to depend upon a random alignment of his/her social and cultural capital with the social and cultural consensus of the workplace. Social mobility is likely to require the greatest change. In their analysis of the 2011 Great British Class Survey, Savage et.al. (2013) found that students from non-professional backgrounds in H.E had the second highest score on their number of social contacts, but their status scores tended to be moderate. However, when student recruits identify with the workplace, they are likely to establish new social contacts with work colleagues and those of a similar occupation, especially student recruits experiencing social mobility. New social contacts are likely to impact on their social identity, although they can construct an identity which is only intended for the workplace.

2.1.4. Vocational Habitus

Becoming an employee can be initially achieved through the concept of vocational habitus, which according to Colley et.al. “proposes that the learner aspire to a certain combination of
dispositions demanded by the vocational culture” (2003, p.488). The vocational culture describes the appropriate professional attitudes which employees are expected to adopt, but workplace culture is specific to each workplace and needs to be experienced. In applying the social theory of Bourdieu (2004), vocational habitus provides the potential for change across the space between workplace and the student recruit acting as an agent of change. The student recruit enters a workplace for the first time without knowledge of unfamiliar work colleagues or unfamiliar work practices, and he/she can join the unfamiliar community of practice by imitating the language and behavior of work colleagues. It is the interaction of habitus, technical knowledge stemming from the cultural capital of exam qualifications and the student recruit’s expectations of the workplace which generates the logic of practice (Reay, 2004).

Since, the term ‘habitual behaviour’ suggests that the individual is locked into a behaviour pattern, Burkitt preferred the term 'habitus' because it, “denotes an acquired ability or faculty rather than an acquired habit to act in a routine way” (2002, p.224). The relevance of a construction of vocational habitus was identified in the research of Colley et.al. (2003), which investigated three case studies from English F.E. colleges, with the intention of discovering how students can be prepared for entry to a career. The findings of the research can be illustrated by the case study of students studying to become a nursery nurse. The students found that the emotional aspect of practical training was difficult and exhausting at first, but at the start of the second year the students had come to realise that, “you’re a different person when you’re at nursery than when you’re at home” (p. 481). The authors concluded that the nursery nurse students, “agreed that this enabled them to stay calm as a nursery nurse in situations where they would ‘lose their cool’ with younger siblings or friends at college” (p. 482). The nursery nurse students had constructed an identity for the workplace.

Nevertheless, it is likely that the students’ workplace identity would also have an impact outside the workplace, as Davey argues, “habitus can be seen as generating classed practices linked to where groups of individuals are positioned through similar stocks of economic, cultural and social capital” (2009, p. 278). The student recruit to the workplace can expect to be defined as an individual by the economic rewards of belonging to the workplace, but also by the experience of belonging to the workplace, which is likely to enhance his/her social and cultural capital.
Their research led to Colley et.al. to the conclusion that, “a central aspect of students’ learning appears to be a process of orientation to a particular identity, a sense of what makes ‘the right person for the job’ “ (2003, p.488). This conclusion suggested that students choose a career which resonates with their social attitudes and opinions, derived from previous social interaction. A limitation of the research was that the students, in all three case studies, had already identified with a career, before they had the opportunity to consider the demands of that career. In constructing an identity for the workplace, Colley et.al. also suggested that it must be a ‘choosable’ identity, one which falls within their horizons for action (p.488). This suggestion led to a second weakness of their research, through the conclusion that students must have social and family backgrounds, individual preferences and life experiences that predispose them to orientate to the vocational habitus and become ‘right for the job’, implying that students are likely to find it difficult to escape social positioning in the choice of a career.

The capacity to change functioning (Sen, 2005), and construct an appropriate vocational habitus for the workplace, seems to depend upon student self-efficacy, defined by Pinquart et.al. as, "people's judgement of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required in attaining designated types of performance" (2003, p.331). The capacity of the student to apply his/her personal attributes to join the new social situation of a workplace is likely to be linked to social and cultural capital. Although Bourdieu argued that individuals contain within themselves their past and present position in the social structure, “at all times and in all places, in the forms of dispositions which are so many marks of social position” (1990, p.82), it seems possible to construct a vocational habitus which avoids social positioning and allows for social mobility, through recognition of the workplace community of practice.

2.1.5. Community of Practice

The concept of ‘community of practice’ suggests that context gives meaning to learning; Lave argued that, “learning is embedded in the context in which learned skills will be practiced” (1982, p.187), a process Lave identified as ‘situated learning’ (1991). When the student recruit first enters the workplace, he/she is initially, “legitimised as peripheral … claims to competence are accepted as provisional” (Farnsworth et.al. p.155). The student recruit gains acceptance in the workplace community of practice by learning how to demonstrate occupational
competency; “knowledgeability is not just information but an experience of living in a landscape of practice and negotiating one’s position in it,” (p. 142).

Recognising the significance of the concept of community of practice, Holmes advised that “people making a transition from one workplace to another must identify the features of new interactional norms and their significance in representing societal and community values” (2015, p78). Since the student recruit to the workplace is unlikely to be familiar with the ‘interactional norms’ and ‘societal and community values’ in the workplace, he/she must rely upon self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) to join the workplace community of practice.

In order to sustain employment, the student recruit can expect to identify with work colleagues, defined by Wenger-Trayner as a group of people, “who share a common concern or a passion for something they can do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly .... a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people” (2015, pp. 1-2). Unless the student is able to identify with work colleagues, the student recruit is likely to be marginalised and unable to demonstrate occupational competency.

However, a difficulty with the application of the concept of community to the workplace is that work colleagues are likely to belong to communities other than the workplace. Student recruits are likely to belong to other social groupings, and bring their own identity to the workplace, in addition to joining the workplace community of practice. Combining various roles can be traumatic since, as Wenger argued, “the ways in which we engage with each other and with the world, profoundly shapes our experience of who we are. We learn what we can do and how the world responds to our actions” (2000, p.227). Student recruits to the workplace can expect to be defined and define themselves by their occupation, but they can also expect to reconcile that identity with others previously formed.

Furthermore, Hodkinson and Hodkinson asked, “if learning differs in different communities of practice, what aspects of those differences are determined by macro factors of occupational organisation, structure and purpose – the large scale version of a community – and what by particular, localised patterns of social interaction – the small scale version?” (2004, p.23). Does the student recruit to a workplace identify with his/her immediate group of work colleagues, or
with the wider occupational organisation? In their research into school subject departments, Hodkinson and Hodkinson concluded that, “all four accounts of learning in the subject departments gave testament to Lave and Wenger’s (1991) claim that learning is centrally concerned with social relations and belonging” (p. 30). The research found a difference between subject departments, in the level of co-operation between departmental colleagues, suggesting that interaction with work colleagues is not the same as meeting employer expectations. They concluded that, “workplace learning varies according to the precise context and form of those (social) relations, whether workers are in a tightly-knit community of practice or not” (p. 30).

The implication for the student recruit to the workplace is that identification with a group of work colleagues with whom they are most comfortable will not necessarily enable the student recruit to meet employer expectations.

According to Colley et.al., the transition from being a student to being an employee is, “far more complex than a passive absorption into a community of practice” (2003, p.488). However, developing student employability can enable the student to pursue a preferred career through knowing how to join the workplace community of practice on entry to the workplace for the first time. The next section examines the nature of employability.

### 2.2. Student employability

The study has adopted one of the three definitions of employability suggested by Harvey which enables students to be prepared for entry to the workplace for the first time: “the propensity to exhibit attributes that employers anticipate will be necessary for the future effective functioning of their organisation” (2001, p.100). The other two definitions of employability suggested by Harvey (p.100) can only be assessed once the student has demonstrated occupational competency as an employee, since they rely upon the student recruit finding a satisfying job which allows the student to exercise his/her technical skills, and be able to sustain employment. Nevertheless, if the student, as an employee, is able to find a satisfying job and sustain employment he/she would have demonstrated the personal attributes of employability expected by an employer.

Employers have recognised the importance of the personal attributes of employability since the service sector of the UK economy became the primary source of employment (table 1.1).
However employers have been unable to explain how employees can acquire appropriate personal attributes. The 2016 CBI ‘Education and Skills Survey’ concluded that, “businesses look beyond academic results and formal qualifications to wider attitudes and aptitudes when recruiting school and college leavers” (p.36), without suggesting how students could acquire appropriate attitudes and aptitudes. The 2014 'Ready for Work' Report of Impetus, a UK private equity educational foundation, identified five characteristics which enabled students to be ready for work, but the only suggestion in the report as to how these characteristics could be acquired by students was through, "stable personal circumstances" (p.13). The Impetus Report implied that students from disadvantaged backgrounds were likely to struggle with employability, whatever their academic knowledge.

The acquisition of personal attributes of employability would seem to depend upon the student’s accumulation of social and cultural capital, a product of variable factors external to formal education. It is difficult to isolate the impact of formal education; Harvey recognised that a primary limitation of his findings was that, “even if there was a meaningful, sector-wide measure of the array of graduate attributes (beyond subject knowledge), then ... the outcomes would not necessarily be attributable to the efforts of the institution” (2001, p.106). It also seems that extra-curricular activities are unlikely to recompense students for limited social and cultural capital. The 2017 UK Social Mobility Commission report concluded that, “disadvantaged students are still less likely to participate in internships or other extra-curricular activities known to boost employability while at university” (p.64). Students remain students until they enter the full-time workplace and benefit from situated learning (Lave 1991). In order to join the workplace community of practice as employees, students can expect to employ their personal attributes.

2.2.1. Personal attributes of employability

The personal attributes of employability required in the workplace have been identified by both employer organisations and academic research (table 2.1.). The 2013 CBI survey collected data from 294 employers, employing 2.1 million people, and identified, “determination, optimism, and emotional intelligence (the ability to deal with the emotions of themselves and work colleagues)” (p.7) as the most valuable personal attributes of employees. A similar set of personal attributes was provided by the research of Macnamara (2009) in a list of soft skills
which “dominate the workplace” (p.25), and by the research of Nickson et.al. (2004) into the de-industrialised economy of Glasgow (2000).

The need for students to acquire personalised attributes of employability is unlikely to diminish with the continued growth of employment opportunities in the service industry (table 1.1). The emergence of the retail and hospitality sector in post-industrial Glasgow provided a clear example of industrial change in the UK economy, leading Nickson et.al. (2004) to conclude that, “sociability, self-presentation, friendliness, drive, honest/integrity, conscientiousness and adaptability are more important selection criteria than technical skills,” (p.17). However, neither academic research nor the CBI has satisfactorily suggested how student recruits to the workplace might acquire appropriate personal attributes of employability.

Macnamara proposed a metacognitive approach, which included e-learning to attract the millennia generation of students (2000, p.25), however he ignored the influence of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) and situated learning (Lave, 1991). The research of Nickson et.al. (2004) identified key personal attributes of employability for the service industry, but implied that without those attributes, students were not employable. Although the 2013 CBI report identified a lack of workplace skills in its student recruits, it suggested that these could be improved by the better preparation of students for employment by schools.

Table 2.1. Attributes of employability (CBI, 2013; Macnamara, 2009; Nickson, et.al. 2004;
Survival in the workplace: Self-preservation, resilience, accepts supervision, contribute to organisation of work, adapt to different ways of working.

The difference between school and the workplace encapsulates the difference between being a student and being an employee. Students expect a learning environment which is designed to provide support for their academic achievement, whereas employees are expected to contribute to the organisation of work. Student recruits to the workplace are expected to demonstrate attributes of employability (see pilot study 3.3.2), with the employer providing supervision rather than support. Being able to respond to supervision is a common characteristic of employability, and Ball observed, “an increase in supervisory control, frequently through changes in work organisation and the increased use of interactive new technology (which interrogates the user)” (2009, pp.39-40). Employers in the Glasgow retail and hospitality industry were reluctant to trust their employees in the interface with their customers to the extent that, “call centres and fast food outlets commonly script employees’ verbal interaction with customers,” (Nickson et. al. p.6).

Student recruits to the workplace may also have to reconcile themselves to a lack of opportunity to apply the technical knowledge they have derived from their academic qualifications, if those qualifications do not contribute to existing organisation of work. In the 2006 Skills at Work Survey, Felstead et.al. discovered that, “2 out of 5 workers are in jobs for which they are ‘overqualified’, in the sense that the qualification level they perceive is required to get the job done is lower that the qualifications they themselves hold” (2007, pp.62-63). Academic qualifications were no longer seen by employers as necessarily leading to employability. Although there was an increase of 9.4.% in the GCSE pass rate between 2009 and 2013 (table 2.2.) the 2013 City and Guilds report concluded that, “employers are largely concerned that young people are less equipped for the workplace compared with five years ago” (p.4).

Table 2.2. Students achieving 5 GCSE grades A*-C, including Maths and English, 2009-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pass rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>49.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The increase in academic qualifications also failed to impress the 2016 CBI Education and Skills survey, which found that, “nearly half (48%) of businesses are not satisfied with the resilience and self-management of young people, while more than a quarter (26%) report poor team working skills,” adding that, “these are capacities needed for virtually every job in every sector” (p.33). Employer dissatisfaction with student recruits may be a product of the generation gap between employers and young people, but employers registered a clear concern that their student recruits lacked work readiness.

There remains a knowledge gap of how to translate academic qualifications into occupational competency for students entering the workplace for the first time. However, becoming a successful employee does not only depend upon being effective in the workplace, it also depends upon achieving a sense of belonging to the workplace.

2.2.2. Belonging to a workplace

Belonging to a workplace seems to be a key element of the employee’s identity and wellbeing. From his research into vocational education, Kunchinke observed that:

“Work is central to human existence. It provides the necessities of life, opportunities for service and achievement, and determination of social standing and reputation.... work is also an existential concern, offering the possibility for the full range of human experience, including satisfaction, exuberance, and joy, but also disappointment, regret and despair” (2013, p.23).

The student may be unable to find a workplace of choice, but the benefit of employment would seem to be greater than the debilitating effect of unemployment; Bell and Blanchflower observed that, “unemployment is a stressful life event that makes people unhappy .... (it) increases susceptibility to malnutrition, illness, mental stress, and loss of self-esteem, leading
to depression” (2010, pp.13-14). The authors quoted from a survey of 2,004 16-25 year olds, conducted in October 2008 by The Prince’s Trust, which found that, “27% of NEETs (not in education, employment, or training) reported that life had 'no purpose', compared with 14% overall; only 60% of NEETs said they were happy compared with 71% for all young people,” (p.11).

The primary intention of revised statutory careers guidance (2014b) was to avoid students becoming NEETS, and to that extent it contributed to student employability, however, once the student finds employment on leaving the education system, job satisfaction becomes a important consideration (see section 4.2.2.). As Tomlinson argued, "work is not purely a technical matter which individuals undertake, it is a personal matter which involves the location of self and identity in an ongoing social process of engagement with the labour process within which they operate" (2007, p.278). Unfortunately, one implication of this argument is that those students who find themselves in a workplace which they would not have not chosen, and which is not compatible with their expectations of employment, would be in danger of resenting the location of self which that workplace confers upon them. If student recruits detach themselves from the workplace they are unlikely to achieve a necessary sense of self-esteem and attract the esteem of work colleagues (Maslow, 1943), as Robert et.al. observed, “there is a logical progression from satisfying belongingness to seeking esteem because both involve social interactions” (2013, p.159).

The desire of the employee to achieve a sense of belonging to the social situation of the workplace was considered by Maslow (1943) to be a basic human need, and it is likely to influence the employee’s motivation to sustain employment (Luftenegger et.al. 2012). It has been argued by Fejesa and Kopsenan that "identity is about belonging .... The construction of an identity is ... the result of individual’s participation in communities of practice, and the social interactions within these practices are crucial for the shaping of, and the renegotiation of identities” (2014, pp.268-9). Wanting to achieve a sense of belonging to the workplace is likely to encourage the student recruit to act as an agent of change and to re-negotiate an identity which reflects the collective identity of the workplace community of practice.

The student can expect his/her work role to have a significant impact on identity. In considering the school-to-work transition, Ng and Feldman concluded that, “we define work role
identification as the extent to which a person spends a large amount of time in the work role, feels positively towards the work role, and is able to express his/her personal values within the work role” (2007, p.16). The search for a work role compatible with the student’s identity of self may lead to a change of employment.

The Wolf Report (2011) considered change of employment to be a common occurrence for employees in their 20s (2011, p.74). However, the search for a compatible workplace may be the product of a shortage of appropriate job opportunities, and the student may have to contemplate employment in a workplace which does not reflect his/her career aspirations. Research into the role of career competencies led Akkermans et.al. to conclude that, “young employees often experience poor work socialization, unsatisfactory employment, unfavourable working conditions, high dropout rates and underemployment” (2013, p.356). The student may also have to contemplate employment which reflects social positioning. This was illustrated by a Finnish study (Siivonen et.al. 2016), which compared the employment destination of Lisa, from a working class background, with Henri, from a middle class background. According to Siivonen et.al., the Finnish education system, “has been celebrated as a country where everyone has the possibility to educate themselves and to get ahead in life through education” (p.110). Both Lisa and Henri graduated from a general upper-secondary school for adults and achieved higher education degrees in adulthood. However, the authors of the study concluded that, “Lisa’s account shows how working-class background, and the lack of economic and social capital, makes the climb upwards on the social ladder more strenuous, or even unachievable, than for someone like Henri, coming from a family of academics provided with a share of social and cultural capital at birth” (p.122).

Although both Finnish students had a gap in their education, and their life experience would have been more extensive than UK sixth-form students, their employment destination was clearly influenced by their background. Gender and age may have also been influential factors, but socio-economic background was identified as being the most significant factor for each student. Possessing, “the right kinds of characteristics and abilities that make her/him appealing for potential employers” (p.111) proved to be a deciding factor. Students from a disadvantaged background are likely to have a narrower life experience than other students, and therefore they are likely to have less of a social and cultural capital fund to draw upon when being recruited to a workplace.
Social positioning in the workplace can undermine the enhancement of cultural capital provided by academic qualifications, since the wellbeing of the employee does not only depend upon achieving a preferred occupational status. The significance of subjective wellbeing (SWB) was demonstrated by a Swedish study, which collected data from the 2331 student nurses enrolled in the second semester at all universities in Sweden in the Autumn of 2002 (Lindfors et.al., 2014). The study recognised two aspects of SWB, cognitive wellbeing (CWB) and affective wellbeing (AWB). The findings of the study revealed that during a nursing university course over the next 2 years, student CWB and AWB increased, and the increase initially continued after the transition to employment, but then both CWB and AWB began a steady decline. The authors concluded that, “the transition from H.E. to employment was, in many ways, an anticipated and predictable life event, which imposed no major threat to the individual’s cognitive evaluation”, but that, “the developmental SWB trajectories also suggested that, over time, other factors including for instance current work-related challenges or life changes outside work influence SWB” (p.191). There are factors other than career preference which influence job satisfaction.

Despite entering a preferred workplace, student nurses, as employees, could not rely upon maintaining CWB and AWB without taking account of external factors. A shortcoming of the Swedish research was that it did not quantify the impact of occupational satisfaction compared to the impact of other factors. Employee wellbeing does not only depend upon following a preferred career, as Greenhalgh observed, “a sense of personal identity, as it relates to its purpose in the world, is necessary to enable a person to learn in relation to wider contexts of meaning. Learning and its meaning becomes related to the wider social and cultural sphere,” (2004. p.159). Although the workplace is responsible for conferring only a partial identity, in terms of occupation, it also confers meaning which relates to ‘the wider social and cultural sphere’ in terms of income and social status.

Identification with the workplace includes recognition of the purpose of the workplace; Clarke argued that the coherence of the neo-liberal economy is, “provided by the combination of the logic of market rationality ... a calculating framework of efficiency, and a view of authority as a fundamental political and social bond” (2008, p.141). The employee is expected to contribute to the market rationality of cost-effectiveness, whether in the private or public sector (Harvey, 2006), and identification with that end implies conformity to a political and social bond. When
the student enters the workplace he/she can expect to create a social bond with others in the social situation of the workplace, which recognises a common political agenda. Whether or not student recruitment to the workplace depends upon political outlook is beyond the remit of this study.

Although there is a broad understanding of what constitutes employability, and an understanding of the impact of belonging to a workplace, there is a lack of understanding as to how sixth-form students can be prepared for entry to a workplace for the first time. This study addresses that lack of understanding through the intervention of sixth form education.

2.3. The contribution of secondary education to student employability

In the UK, employers have complained, for some time, that students are not being prepared by school for entry to the workplace. The 2013 City and Guilds survey found that, “employers worry that young people are leaving education without the right skills because the education system is too focused on academia (49%) and does not meet the needs of businesses (47%) ” (p.4). Likewise, the 2016 CBI report concluded that, “according to employers, school and college is not equipping all young people with what they need to succeed” (p. 30). Employers have been disappointed with the work readiness of their student recruits; nevertheless school can contribute to the development of student employability.

2.3.1. The contribution of school to student employability

Schools have an opportunity to benefit sixth-form student employability through academic achievement which can enhance student self-efficacy, defined by Bandura as, “a belief in one’s capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance,” (1986, p.391). A longitudinal investigation by Pinquart et.al. (2003) discovered a link between self-efficacy beliefs and the grades in school of German students who were aged 12-15 and unemployment, and job satisfaction at the age of 21. The authors concluded that, “high academic self-efficacy beliefs in school are associated with an increased probability of successfully mastering the school-to-work transition, as indicated by not becoming unemployed
and being satisfied with one’s job,” (p.343). However, students who developed self-efficacy because of academic achievement in the lower school may find that they were unable to replicate academic achievement in the sixth-form (Pinquart et.al., 2003), which would challenge their self-efficacy. Students cannot expect to rely upon the self-efficacy provided by academic achievement, especially in social interaction with work colleagues, and are likely to benefit from preparation for entry to the workplace.

The school has statutory responsibility for careers provision in the U.K. (Education Act 2011) and in her research into post 2011 statutory careers guidance, Chadderton concluded that, “the most important factor for successful school-based careers work was effective and supportive leadership” (p.87). Since statutory careers guidance (DfE, 2014b) included a judgement by the Office of Standards in Education (Ofsted) on school management and leadership, schools could be expected to commit resources to vocational education. However, schools are also conscious of the financial incentive (Education Act, 1988) to retain students for their sixth-form, which led Chadderton to observe that, “schools that have their own sixth-forms may be unlikely to be able to provide impartial guidance on wider post-16 options” (p.86).

The contribution of school to the development of student employability depends on a clear understanding of how it can contribute to that development. In considering school to work transition (SWT), Ng and Feldman concluded that, “by equipping young adults with work-related skills and knowledge, vocational educational programs directly promote a high level of work role identification, which in turn positively influences STWT success” (2007, p.119). This study argues that learning to belong to a workplace community of practice, and adopting appropriate work role identification depends upon situated learning (Lave, 1991) in the workplace rather than transmitted skills and knowledge learnt in school. Nevertheless, school can develop student employability through an extension of existing pedagogic practice.

In considering the preparation of students for entry to a workplace, Pinquart et.al. concluded that, “school-based interventions targeted at increasing academic capabilities and self-efficacy would help prepare adolescents for a successful school-to-work transition” (2003, p.329). A consideration of self-efficacy (Bandura et.al. 2001) alongside academic achievement recognises that becoming an employee relies on applying personal attributes to join the workplace community of practice in addition to examination results. However, the suggestion of Pinquart
et.al. that school intervention “may focus on the introduction of successful role models with a similar background” (p. 344), relied upon transmitted knowledge and demonstrated a lack of understanding of situated learning (Lave, 1991).

Student employability seems to depend upon the student being able to apply his/her personal attributes to belong to a workplace community of practice, as Lüftenegger et.al. observed, “self-efficacy influences the choice of learning tasks pursued, the degree of effort put into learning as well as perseverance in task execution” (2012, p.28). Only if student recruits to the workplace make appropriate learning choices are they likely find common purpose with the workplace community of practice (Lave, 1991) and demonstrate occupational competency.

Employers have become directly involved in secondary education in order to improve student employability, improved academic performance rather than extend existing practice to include student employability. Employer intervention seems to have shown little understanding of how students can be prepared for entry to the workplace for the first time. The 2015 Teach First report advised that, “teachers are an important source of social capital” (p.10), even though the social capital which generates personal attributes is the product of life experience (Bourdieu, 1986). Although teachers may be able to support students in achieving academic qualifications through existing practice, and support students in achieving a post sixth-form destination appropriate to their academic qualifications, they cannot reproduce the situated learning (Lave, 1991) which occurs in the workplace.

However, there is evidence that sixth-form students listen to the vocational advice of their teachers: the 2016 report of the EY Foundation interviewed 1,510 16-21-year-olds from across the UK and discovered that 77% received careers advice from teachers or tutors, and that 35% thought it was the best advice, compared to 29% from a parent/carer/ guardian and 18% from friends (p.26). The influence of the teacher is suggested by Bowlby’s ‘attachment theory’, defined as, "any form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world" (1988, p.26-7). Students are likely to ‘attach’ themselves to teachers who, as Hooley et.al. observed, “are trusted adults who have made career decisions, built a career and have networks of friends and colleagues who have done the same” (2015, p.21). Teachers have
passed successfully through the formal education system, entered employment, grown an adult life, and are expected to support student learning.

However teachers rely upon the pedagogic practice of transmitting knowledge, whereas developing student employability involves recognising the meaning each student has derived from social and cultural experience. When identifying six roles as a blueprint for a whole school approach to careers education, Hooley et.al. (2015, p.21) included 2 tutorial roles:

- Career informant: being a trusted adult who has made career decisions and has experiences that might inform a young person’s career building.
- Pastoral support: providing pastoral support and helping to make links to career decisions and career support.

Unfortunately the research of Hooley et.al. failed to recognise that learning is only likely to convey meaning if it takes place in context. This study argues that the student can only learn to become an employee in the workplace, and that teachers can only develop student employability if they change a pedagogic practice which is suited to the transmission of knowledge.

Nevertheless, the daily interaction between sixth-form student and teacher provides an opportunity for the teacher to become familiar with the personal attributes of students. Although statutory careers guidance suggests a mentor for those students who struggle to find a post-sixth form destination (DfE, 2014b), each student is likely to require a mentor to develop his/her employability. It may be necessary to include mentoring for each student in statutory careers guidance, to encourage schools to allocate timetable time to the development of student employability. The next section considers the impact on student employability of statutory careers guidance and consequently the impact of the Futures vocational education programme.

2.3.2.Introducing employability mentors

Since this study argues that employability is individualised, one-to-one mentoring would seem to provide the solution to preparing students for entry to the workplace for the first time. Whereas coaching leads to knowledge creation to improve practice, mentoring is a means of
enabling a change of practice (Mullen, 2012). According to Hobson, “we try not to forget that mentoring is first and foremost a relationship,” (2012, p.68), and it would seem that sixth-form tutors are more likely to be aware of their students’ personal attributes than subject teachers. However, being a one-to-one mentor is also different to being a tutor whose purpose is to support student progress through the sixth-form. Therefore sixth-form tutors or teachers can act as employability mentors, providing they are able to interact with students.

The purpose of the mentor would be to prepare students to make the transition (Gay, 2000) from being a student to becoming an employee, albeit delayed by entry to Higher Education. The role of the employability mentor need not obscure the professional boundary between teacher and student, since the mentor would be expected to operate within a structured programme with a clear objective (Miller, 2002 p.25). The introduction of employability mentors would be an extension of the existing curriculum and existing pedagogic practice, rather than result in a change of existing sixth-form provision. Mentors would not be expected to act as counsellors, but act as role models to the extent that they are part of a:

“formalised process whereby a more knowledgeable and experienced person activates a supportive role of overseeing and encouraging personal reflection and learning with a less experienced and knowledgeable person, so as to facilitate that person’s career and personal development,” (Roberts, 2000 p.162).

Since the employability mentor would act as a source of knowledge, he/she would continue to act as a teacher, but develop the student’s personal approach to employability rather than transmit curriculum content. One-to-one employability mentoring acknowledges the theoretical concept of social constructionism, recognising that personal attributes of employability are individualised and drawn from previous and present social experience.

The distance between learning to solve a problem through the intervention of a mentor and independent problem solving as an employee was suggested by Vygotsky’s (1976) concept of the, ‘zone of proximal development’. Mentoring can begin the process of the student learning to become an employee, but it remains for the student recruit to the workplace to discover how to join the workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5.) The mentor cannot guarantee
that the student is able to demonstrate appropriate personal attributes of employability in the workplace, but he/she can introduce the student to the process of acting as an agent of change. Self-efficacy (Pinquart et al. 2003) and the impact of situated learning (Lave 1991) means that the transition from being a student to becoming an employee can only be accomplished by the student recruit to the workplace.

Although the introduction of employability mentors would lead to an extension of existing sixth-form practice, it would require a dedicated space in the curriculum. The Old school sixth-form provides tutors with a twenty-minute period at the beginning of each school day to register attendance and support student progress through the sixth-form, which does not allow for one-to-one mentoring (Miller, 2002). However there would not be a requirement for additional members of staff since existing tutors and/or teachers are best placed to act as mentor, being recognised by students as a source of knowledge within the cultural and social context of a sixth-form learning environment (Vygotsky 1994). The credibility of the employability mentor lies in being a recognised as source of knowledge, rather than as a personal counsellor who might be perceived as intrusive by the student. The introduction of Miller’s concept of ‘planned’ mentoring which, “involves structured programmes with clear objectives, where mentors and mentees are matched using formal processes,” (2002, p.25), allows for a natural extension of existing pedagogic practice. The next section considers the influence of statutory careers guidance on The Old School’s vocational education programme.

2.3.3. Statutory careers guidance and the Futures programme

After being handed responsibility for careers education, schools were encouraged to provide students with access to external careers advice (DfE, 2012); although Watts observed that, “all a school had to do, it seemed, was to affirm that it viewed signposting to a website as the most suitable support for young people to make successful transitions” (2013, p.446). The Futures programme of the Old School sixth-form was introduced in 2012 to provide students with access to careers information, advice and guidance (DfE, 2012) and satisfy statutory careers guidance (Appendix C), avoiding the involvement of external careers organisations.

The urban student intake of The Old School sixth-from was likely to rely upon the Futures programme to enable students to identify appropriate career pathways. Few of the students’
parents had benefitted from Higher Education, many relied upon social housing, and many were first generation immigrants (Appendix A). The programme also introduced students to multi-national employers and established links which provided meaningful work experience placements. However, the purpose of the programme was to satisfy statutory careers guidance (Appendix D), which seemed to be primarily concerned to prevent students becoming NEETS (not in education, employment or training), “to help every young person realise their potential and so increase economic competitiveness and support social mobility,” (Dfe, 2014b p.5), rather than to develop student employability outside academic qualifications.

The statutory obligation to track student post sixth-form destinations led Chadderton to observe that, “statutory requirement ... does not include whether the destination was suitable and matched their interests” (2015, p.86). Statutory guidance assumed that if students were matched with a post sixth-form destination appropriate to their academic qualifications, they would be able to demonstrate occupational competency and sustain employment. However, without preparation for entry to a workplace for the first time, the student would depend upon finding a workplace which was compatible with his/her social and cultural capital (see section 2.1.2.).

Statutory careers guidance failed to impress employers. The 2016 CBI report concluded that, “around half of businesses are not satisfied with ... school leavers ... skills in communication (50%), analysis (50%) and self-management (48%)” (p.30). The report suggested that school leavers did not have sufficient social and cultural capital to interact with unfamiliar others and adapt to unfamiliar work practices. Unless students are prepared to act as agents of change when they enter a workplace for the first time, they are likely to find themselves relying upon their existing social and cultural capital (see section 2.1.2). Reliance upon a random match with the collective capital of the workplace community of practice is likely to reduce the benefit of academic qualifications, discourage social mobility, and encourage students to embark upon a random search for a compatible workplace.

Although students have the potential to change their functioning (Sen, 1997), statutory careers guidance assumed that inspirational role models were sufficient to develop appropriate personal attributes of, “resilience, goal setting, hard work and social confidence” (DfE, 2014b, p.9). However, Galliott and Graham argued that central government initiatives which intended
to place students in occupations appropriate to their academic qualifications, risked failure because of their assumption that, “agentive action is simply a question of will,” (2014, p.274). Student recruits are unlikely to be able to join the workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5.) without recognising the process involved. Although student agency cannot avoid the influence of accumulated social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), it can construct a vocational habitus (see section 2.1.4) for the workplace, providing the student is prepared for change when entering the workplace as an employee.

Although statutory careers guidance (DfE, 2014b) recognised that ‘mentoring and coaching’ might be advisable for some students (p. 10), it suggested that mentors or coaches could provide, “a more nurturing influence, helping young people to build their confidence and resilience” (p. 13). The Futures programme provided individual support for seven Y13 students from the 2015-16 intake who had not secured a post sixth-form destination (Appendix E); however, this support was intended to identify an appropriate career path rather than address the issue of employability.

Instead of providing a mentor (see section 2.3.4.) for all students to develop employability, at the time of the research the Futures programme was in the process of providing the opportunity for meaningful work experience placements for all students, in order offer an insight into the workplace. Since The Old School was located in the inner city, it had access to a variety of large companies with the potential to provide meaningful placements.

2.3.4. The benefit of work experience to student employability

Work experience was included in statutory advice (DfE, 2015b), rather than statutory guidance, and was not included in Ofsted assessment of schools. Nevertheless, the Futures programme planned to introduce work experience placements for all students relevant to their course of study, as a means of providing an insight into the workplace community of practice. The programme had started with BTEC students who were thought to be most likely to enter employment after the sixth-form (Appendix F). The benefit of work experience was suggested by the 2012 report of the UK Education and Employers Taskforce, which concluded that, “approximately two-thirds of young people find their placements generally helpful in thinking about career aspirations, with one-third finding them very helpful” (Mann, 2012, p.11).
Employers also considered work experience to be a valuable recommendation for employment. The 2013 City and Guilds Report into recruitment by employers discovered that, “two thirds (67%) would be more likely to hire a young person with work experience over someone with none, because those with work experience are seen as having a better understanding of the work environment (77%) and a better attitude towards work” (p. 5).

Although a work experience placement can introduce the student to the workplace community of practice, the student remains a student; Cerulo concluded that, “in probing identity, all authors consider both linguistic communication and social practice through their linkage to context” (1997, p.395). Work experience can also provide an introduction to the nature of employment; Billet observed that work experience was likely to construct, “authentic knowledge about the world of work, because it provides authentic working life experiences” (2005, p.51). However, a brief two-week work experience placement seems insufficient for a significant insight into the workplace.

The partnership between the sixth-form and employers offering a meaningful placement provides an opportunity for students to become familiar with employer expectations; Hooley et.al. advised that, “the OECD found that the partnership model was the strongest model of delivery, combining the potential for strong integrated delivery across the school with an organisation with strong links to the labour market” (2015, p.18). Nevertheless, Chadderton observed that international evidence suggested that, “school based guidance systems tend to have weak links to the labour market” (p. 87).

Employer involvement in work experience has proved to be problematic for the Futures programme, despite the claim by the CBI that, “the proportion of employers with links to schools and colleges offering work experience placements has risen to 81% in 2013” (2013, p. 28). The Futures programme co-ordinator recognised (see p.140) that employers rely upon the programme to provide meaningful work experience placements since they are not equipped to provide meaningful placements themselves. The value attached by employers to work experience placements would seem to provide an opportunity for a partnership between employers and schools. However, six years after the publication of the Wolf review into vocational education (2011), the online Further Education Week reported Professor Wolf as observing that, “I don’t feel we have made as much progress as I would have liked in getting

Although meaningful work experience placements provide an introduction to employment, Billet concluded that the personal interests and financial goals associated with paid part-time work, “might result in a more full-bodied engagement with the workplace and work than in situations where such motivations may not exist in substitute activities, such as work experience” (2005, p.53). Part-time work provides the student with a prolonged experience of employment, and the need to sustain employment in order to secure an income, therefore it can be considered to be a more valuable preparation for entry to the workplace than work experience. From research into working pupils, Howieson concluded that, "most thought that their job enabled them to develop their skills and abilities and to learn a lot of new things (70% and 62 %,) as well as allowing the scope to make decisions and organise their own time at work (65% and 59%)” (2013, p.431). The Wolf Report also recognised that, "employers value ‘work history’ and work experience, that is having held a proper paid job in a real workplace, as opposed to work related experience in an educational or government training scheme”(2011, p. 77).

A work experience placement can have an impact on student social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The 2016 EY Foundation report found that, “more than twice as many young people learned about starting conversations with people they don’t know, while doing work experience (59%) than learned about it at school (24%),” (p.24). Nevertheless, Mann (2012) questioned the value of work experience placements and quoted a 2010 YouGov poll for the UK Education and Employers Taskforce which, “questioned more than a thousand teenagers and young adults about the placements they had undertaken and found that around one third complained of a poor quality experience where structured opportunities for learning were very limited,” (2012, p. 33). Research by Waller et.al. into undergraduate memories of school-based work experience placements found that, “placements badged as ‘nursing’ typically transpired to be menial placements in care homes, with schools unable to match relevant experiences with the young people’s abilities and career aspirations” (2014, p.327).

Unless a work experience placement is relevant to a student’s course of study, and provides an insight into a workplace community of practice, the placement is unlikely to enhance student
employability. The 2009 Milburn Report on social mobility recommended that, “the Government should undertake a radical overhaul of work experience programmes in schools .... to ensure that they are professionally organised and better aligned with pupils’ careers decision-making” (p.57). The selection of students for a placement by the Futures programme (see p.141), at the request of employers (see section 3.3.2) was likely to benefit those with sufficient social and cultural capital for entry to an unfamiliar workplace. Students who are most in need to extending their social and cultural capital are likely to be excluded from work experience placements; Hatcher and Le Gallais (2008) found a strong positive correlation between the proportion of young people in a school coming from professional families and the proportion of high-quality placements.

Work experience placements provided by schools have proved to be of doubtful benefit in developing the employability of students: Fuller et.al. (2011) found that work experience for students aspiring to higher education was irrelevant, and that students from a working class school were directed students into uninspiring and unchallenging roles in retail, leisure and childcare. One of the interviews carried out by Waller et.al. revealed the limitation of school based work experience: “in the end, his school found Mark a ‘safety net’ placement in a high-street retailer which was not challenging, useful or enjoyable. When his own efforts failed to secure something suitable, Mark was unable to fall back on family resources, while his school was either unwilling or unable to be more helpful” (2014, p.336).

The 2016 EY Foundation report found that, “it is really hard to get good quality work experience when you don’t have the connections and even harder if you don’t know the options available to you,” (2016, p. 4). In contrast, Waller et.al. concluded that, “nearly all working class participants who found high-quality placements did so under their own initiative,” (p.345). Whatever the source of work experience, a placement can only provide a brief introduction to the workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5) in comparison with the more prolonged and more meaningful experience of part-time employment. However the student is likely to display the social and cultural capital of being a student until joining the full-time workplace. Students would seem to be better prepared for employability if they were mentored in the sixth-form rather than rely upon work experience.

2.4. Summary
The first part of the literature review is an examination of the conceptual framework of the inquiry, underpinned by the interpretive paradigm of social constructionism. The framework recognises four concepts which can transform the student into an employee. Each student enters the workplace with a fund of social and cultural capital which is embodied in the habitus of the student, influenced by academic qualification and previous social experience (Bourdieu 1984). In acting as an agent of change the student can adjust his/her habitus, under the influence of the field/social situation of the workplace by a change of functioning (Sen, 2005) to construct a vocational habitus (Colley et. al, 2003) in order to join the workplace community of practice (Lave, 1991).

The second part of the literature review investigated the nature of student employability. The study has adopted Harvey’s second definition of employability, “the propensity ... to exhibit attributes that employers anticipate will be necessary for the future effective functioning of their organisation” (2001, p.100). This definition allowed students to be prepared for entry to the workplace. The growth of the service sector of the UK economy (table 1.1) has been very significant for the development of student employability, ensuring that appropriate personal attributes of employability have become a necessary supplement to appropriate academic qualifications when students enter a workplace for the first time. Employers clearly expect student recruits to enter their workplace with appropriate personal attributes to join the workplace community of practice and contribute to the organisation of work.

The third part of the literature review considered the impact on student employability of school, statutory guidance and the Futures programme of the case study sixth-form, which included meaningful work experience placements. Although appropriate personal attributes for the workplace have been identified by academic and employer research (table 2.1), neither has been unable to suggest how student recruits can successfully acquire these personal attributes. Revised statutory careers guidance for schools recommended transmitted knowledge of personal attributes appropriate for the workplace, but this approach has failed to satisfy employers that student recruits are ready to enter the workplace. Finally the third part of the review investigates the potential for sixth-form teachers/tutors to become employability mentors who can build on the empathetic relationship which can develop between student and teacher in school.
Three research questions emanated from this review (table 2.3.) which addressed the issue of the development of student employability at the case study English school sixth form:

RQ1. What are sixth-form student perceptions and experience of employability in an English sixth form?

The first research question emanated from the second section of the literature review on student employability. Personal attributes of employability have become a necessary supplement to academic qualifications in preparing students for entry to a full-time workplace. The application of those attributes to interact with unfamiliar work colleagues and adapt to unfamiliar work practices is likely to determine the capacity of the student, as an employee, to act as an agent of change in order to demonstrate occupational competency and establish a sense of belonging to the workplace. The motivation to act as an agent of change is likely to depend upon the extent to which the workplace satisfies the student’s social expectations of the workplace. Consequently, student perceptions and experiences of employability are likely to have a significant impact on becoming an employee.

RQ 2. What role do sixth-form tutors perceive they have in helping students to develop their employability?

The second research question also derived from the second section of the literature review. Since sixth form tutors are the most likely members of the sixth-form staff to become familiar with the personal attributes of their students, they can be considered best placed to deliver a programme for the development of student employability. Sixth-form tutors are better placed than university lecturers to develop student employability because of the regular interaction with students which occurs in the sixth-form. However, in order to develop student employability, tutors can expect to act as agents of change to become mentors, rather than transit knowledge of employability through existing pedagogic practice. Tutor perceptions and experiences may mean that being a tutor is not necessarily an adequate qualification for being a student mentor.
RQ 3. How do students and staff experience the Futures programme and what impact do they perceive it has on the student capacity for employability?

The third research question stemmed from third section of the literature review, the contribution of secondary education to student employability. School can have a significant impact on student employability, apart from academic qualifications, because of the interaction between student and teacher. The Futures programme satisfied statutory requirements, with the addition of a meaningful work experience programme, suggested by statutory guidance (DfE 2014b) which was intended to provide students with an insight into the workplace community of practice. However, a brief work experience placement is unlikely to be as beneficial as the more prolonged experience of part-time employment. The ambition of the Futures programme reflected the ambition of statutory careers guidance in developing student employability.

Table 2.3. The research questions derived from the literature review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature Review</th>
<th>Emerging research questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1. Personal attributes of employability.</td>
<td>RQ1. What are sixth-form student perceptions and experiences of employability in an English school sixth-form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2. Belonging to the workplace.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1 The contribution of school employability.</td>
<td>RQ 2: What role does sixth-form staff perceive they have in helping to develop student employability?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3. The introduction of employability mentors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.3. Statutory careers guidance and the Futures programme.</td>
<td>RQ 3: How do students and staff experience the Futures programme and what impact do they perceive it has on the student capacity for employability?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.4. The impact of the Futures work experience programme.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next chapter explains the methodology used to investigate the potential of the case study sixth-form to expand its vocational education programme to include student employability.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The aim this chapter is to set out the research paradigm, framework, and methods used to investigate student and staff perceptions and experiences of employability at a UK sixth-form. The first part (3.1.) identifies the paradigm considered appropriate to address the issue of student employability. The second part of the chapter (3.2.) gives details of the study’s research methods and design. Its first section (3.2.1.) introduces the single case study which provides a defined context for the research to investigate student and staff perceptions and experiences of employability. The second section (3.2.2.) describes the pilot study which investigated the perceptions of student preparation for entry to the workplace of employers who had formed a partnership with the case study sixth-form. The third section (3.2.3.) considers my role as an insider researcher, having spent my teaching career at the case study school. The fourth section (3.2.4) explains the use of a purposive sample which reflects the practice of the case study school. The fifth section (3.2.5.) describes the collection of the data and the sixth section (3.2.6.) explains the value of semi-structured interview questions. The final section (3.2.7) provides an overview of the data analysis based upon the process advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The third part of the chapter (3.3.) examines the trustworthiness of the research, using four guidelines: credibility (3.3.1), dependability and transparency (3.3.2), confirmability (3.3.3) and transferability (3.3.4.). The fourth part (3.4.) examines the ethical considerations and limitations of the study. The final part (3.5.) provides a summary of the chapter.
3.1. The study paradigm

The most used and perhaps the most effective paradigms in social science research are positivism and interpretivism (Plowright, 2011), although the two are significantly different. According to Turner (2006), positivism aims to establish generic and universal properties of social life and to, “formulate laws about the dynamic properties, whether these laws are stated in words or mathematics makes much less difference than formulating abstract laws about the operative dynamics of some domain of the social universe” (p.452). The difficulty with this paradigm is that, certainly at a micro-level, social situations cannot be reproduced and are therefore unlikely to conform to laws of social behaviour. Student and staff perceptions and experiences of employability are individualised to the extent that they are derived from a unique set of social experiences.

The interpretive paradigm recognises that social meaning is derived from experience. Nevertheless the common context of the sixth-form community of practice was likely to result in collective social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), such as recognition of the student-teacher relationship or the value of examination results. The common perceptions of sixth-form staff and students enable the identification of themes from qualitative data, as Blaikie argued, “members of a particular group or society share common meanings and interpretations, and they maintain them through their ongoing interaction together” (2000, p.115). The common meaning shared by sixth-form students and tutors constitutes the collective social construct of sixth-form at The Old School.

Once social research moved beyond positivism and objectivism, the theoretical concept of constructivism was applied to the field of careers (Savickas, 1993). This study can be placed in the, ‘discourse of subjectivity and narrative,’ (Young and Colin, 2004), which argues that the subjectivity of individual student employability should be included in the traditional narrative of the sixth-form curriculum. It is the student’s perception of being an employee which is likely to influence his/her preparation for entry to the workplace for the first time, “how the individual constructs self over time, and in context, and includes self-definition, self and agency, purpose, and subjectivity” (Young and Colin, p.381). Nevertheless, although extensive research has been carried out into constructivism in the field of careers (Savikas, 2000, 1993; Savickas & Lent, 1994
and Savickas, 1989), no single study seems to exist which relates the individualised social construct of sixth-form students to the development of their employability.

This study investigates how the individualised student social construct of reality can be used to develop student employability, rather than expecting the student recruit to the workplace to rely upon the being identified as ‘one of us’ by unfamiliar work colleagues. Recognising that the individual’s construct of reality is derived from social interaction in context, the research has adopted a case study approach. The next section describes the research methods and design used to address the real life issue of developing student employability at The Old School sixth-form.

3.2. Research methods and design

Research data was collected from interviews with sixth-form students (n=18), sixth-form tutors (n=11), and the Futures sixth-form vocational education co-ordinator (n=1), using semi-structured questions to encourage the participants to express their own views and opinions. This approach reflected the study’s constructivist theoretical framework, recognising individualised student and staff perceptions and experiences of employability. Each student’s perceptions and experiences would be likely to influence his/her capacity to join the workplace community of practice and sustain employment. Equally, the perceptions and experiences of sixth-form tutors would be likely to influence their delivery of a programme intended to develop student employability. The experience of both students and staff included the impact of Futures vocational education programme of the case study sixth-form which was designed to satisfy statutory careers guidance (2014b).

3.2.1 The Old School sixth-form as a case study

The number of UK sixth-form students and staff provided a potentially limitless source of research data, especially considering the study’s conceptual framework of social constructivism. However, the use of a single case study allowed the research to benefit from a defined context; Emmel observed that, "in a realist sampling strategy, cases provide bounded units in a potentially limitless open social system" (2013, p.107). Although each sixth-form is likely to have
a unique ethos because of the socio-economic background of its intake, its geographical location, and the academic potential of its students, the use of The Old School sixth-form as a case study had two distinct advantages:

1. It provided the researcher with ease of access to sixth-form students and staff.
2. The impact of the Old School’s Futures vocational education programme on student employability was a clear reflection of the impact of statutory careers guidance on student employability (Appendix C).

In considering the benefits of using a case study, Yin advised that, “you would use a case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions – believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study” (2003, p.13). The sixth-form community of practice provided a real life context for the perceptions of staff and students, and the Futures programme provided a reflection of the application of statutory careers guidance. A case study approach also enabled the research findings and implications to be embedded in sixth-form practice; as Stake argued, “when explanation, propositional knowledge and law are the aims of an inquiry, the case study will often be at a disadvantage. When the aims are understanding, extension of experience and increase in conviction in that which is known, the disadvantage disappears” (2009, p.21). The study is not intended to propose a law of student employability, but to identify a means of developing sixth-form student employability within the existing school curriculum.

Through identifying a real life context for the study, the research investigated tacit knowledge, rather than propositional knowledge (Polyani, 1958). Embedding the research in real practice added to the value of its findings and implications for practitioners; as Stake concluded, “case studies will often be the preferred method of research because they may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader’s experience and provide a natural basis for generalization” (2009, p.18.). The readers of this study are intended to be those who are responsible for the delivery of sixth-form vocational education rather than policy makers. My own professional experience of numerous vocational education initiatives suggests that, unless they are embedded in existing practice, they are unlikely to take root because they rely upon theoretical argument rather than practical considerations. Sixth-form teachers are likely to appreciate vocational education research which advises an extension of familiar practice because it does not require uncertain change. The value of a case study for this research lies in its addition to tacit
knowledge; as Stake concluded, “its’ best use appears to me to be adding to existing experience and humanistic understanding” (2009, p.24).

The involvement of partnership employers, through a pilot study (see section 3.2.2.), further grounded the research in a practical context by introducing employer expectations. Although the employer funded Access Project (2014) contributed to the Futures programme, the educational charity acted only to reinforce student progress towards academic achievement, without addressing student employability. Employer funded educational organisations have tended to adopt the same approach to student employability as statutory careers guidance by relying on transmitted knowledge, and they were disappointed by their impact on student employability (Teach First Report, 2015; Impetus Report, 2012).

The value of using The Old School a case study has been to ground the research in sixth-form practice and relate the research to employer expectations. As an experienced education practitioner I was in danger of adopting an educational perspective to the study; however the pilot study, conducted with four employers who had formed a partnership with the case study school, provided a more balanced perspective on the development of student employability.

3.2.2. The pilot Study

The pilot study investigated employer expectations of student recruits. The four employers who took part in the study were chosen because they recruited students from across the academic spectrum, (as shown in table 3.2), and represented diverse employment opportunities.

Table 3.1. The four partnership employers interviewed for the pilot study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partnership company</th>
<th>Formal academic qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retail and Hospitality chain.</td>
<td>GCSE grades and above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-star hotel chain</td>
<td>BTEC / A-levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite and communications company</td>
<td>Graduate degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International engineering company</td>
<td>Graduates with the best degrees.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The research for the pilot study was given credibility by being introduced through the programme co-ordinator. She emphasised the importance of personal contact with employers, and this was substantiated when emailed questionnaires proved to be far less productive than face-to-face interviews. Representatives of the employers were interviewed at their place of work, with the exception of the retail and hospitality representative, who was interviewed during an event at The Old School. The interviewees were asked four questions which investigated employer expectations of school:

1. Why are you interested in a partnership with the sixth-form?
2. What do you think is the role of the school in preparing students for the workplace?
3. What do you think is the value of work experience placements?
4. Does your recruitment process identify personal attributes of employability?

The four employers indicated that the reason for their partnership with the school was to recruit suitable employees, as shown in table 3.2:

Table 3.2. Employers’ response to question 1 of the pilot study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employers</th>
<th>Question 1: Why are you interested in a partnership with the sixth-form?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retail and hospitality chain</td>
<td>Schools and employers should work in collaboration... with respect to teachers, I think that they might not always assess the right skill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-star hotel chain</td>
<td>A condition of receiving planning permission for a new hotel near school was to employ local people. A partnership with the school, including involvement in the B-Tech Hospitality course, is a means of recruiting the most suitable employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite and communications</td>
<td>It is useful in providing an opportunity for students to see what the job involves and allow them to make their own choice of career.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
International engineering company

Existing employees benefit from going into schools. A half-term engineering project has been introduced to Year 9, through a school science teacher, and this involvement encourages students to consider science as a career.

The replies of the two employers who recruited non-graduates suggested that their involvement in education was to attract sixth form students who had the skill set they required, whereas the two employers who recruited graduates were concerned that students make the right career choice. There was no suggestion that the employers were taking responsibility to develop student employability in order to prepare students to enter a workplace for the first time. Employers also expected school to prepare students for academic qualification and employability, as shown in table 3.3:

Table 3.3. Employers’ response to question 2 of the pilot study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employers</th>
<th>Question 2: What do you think is the role of the school in preparing students for the workplace?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retail and Hospitality</td>
<td>In school, students should learn attitudes and behaviours appropriate for the workplace, especially if parents don’t work. It is still very much expected that school leavers will go onto university or college and this isn’t right for all young people. Schools need to consider an alternative and find the best solution for the individual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-star hotel chain</td>
<td>Students need to have a practical knowledge of the hotel industry and this is provided by BTEC courses in school. In recruiting suitable candidates, students either have the right attitude or they do not have the right attitude for a service industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite and Communications company</td>
<td>Students have no choice in attending school but they do have a choice of career. Although the company recruits from Higher Education, school should educate students in making a career choice, which is more important than passing GCSEs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
International Engineering company

The company has provided a project for students in Science in the lower school to encourage an interest in engineering. The school needs to educate students in the ‘soft skills’, with a focus on interpersonal skills and presentation.

Two employers thought that the school should teach personal attributes of employability to students, but neither employer recognised that personal attributes were derived from accumulated social and cultural capital (see section 2.1.2), and could not be taught through transmitted knowledge. The other two employers assumed that student employability depended upon each student choosing a career which was appropriate for his/her personal attributes, implying that students could expect to change employment until they found a compatible workplace, which was likely to result in social positioning irrespective of academic qualifications.

One means of providing students with an insight into the workplace was through work experience placements. The employers’ views of work experience placements were similar, as shown in table 3.4:

Table 3.4. Employers’ response to question 3 of the pilot study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employers</th>
<th>Question 3: What do you think is the value of work experience placements?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retail and Hospitality</td>
<td>We realise it is hard to gain work experience so therefore don’t ask for any students to match their interests to a career.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-star hotel chain</td>
<td>It is useful in providing an opportunity for students to see what the job involves, but it is too short a time for candidates to develop a real understanding. Although work experience is offered, the school is expected to provide suitable candidates for placements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Satellite and communications company

It is useful in providing students with an opportunity to discover if a job with the company reflects their interests. The school is expected to provide suitable candidates.

International Engineering

Useful in providing students with an opportunity to see what the job involves. The school is expected to provide suitable candidates.

Three of the employers argued that work experience placements were valuable in providing students with an opportunity to discover what a career involved. There was no suggestion that placements could enable students to develop their attributes of employability through belonging to a workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5). Two of the employers expected the school to provide suitable students for placements. One employer thought that placements were too brief to be beneficial, and another employer implied that work experience was unnecessary since recruits were expected to follow instructions rather than develop employability, except in having a positive attitude to work.

All four employers provided an induction programme, in order, to introduce student recruits to workplace practice rather than develop student employability, see table 3.5:

**Table 3.5. Employers’ response to question 4 of the pilot study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Question 4: Does your recruitment process identify personal attributes of employability?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retail and Hospitality</td>
<td>We provide them with a mentor (me) who runs their induction, welcomes them, and visits them each month to check they are on track.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-star hotel chain</td>
<td>Key workplace competencies were identified through the recruitment. There is a six months structured training programme, which seeks to enhance these competencies. Internships are offered to provide an insight into the hotel industry and practical knowledge is valued.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The recruitment process is concerned to ensure that the job reflects the interests of new recruits, since this will keep them engaged with the company. New recruits to the company have a mentor who makes sure that they get to know colleagues and are not isolated.

Three of the employers used their recruitment process to identify personal attributes of employability, while the fourth employer, who recruited students with the lowest academic qualifications, expected student recruits only to be willing to learn and follow instructions.

When asked to prioritise the personal attributes of employability suggested by MacNamara (2000), there was a surprising consensus between the four diverse employers. The attributes considered invaluable or very useful were customer care, working in a team, and knowing a product or service; the attributes which were considered very useful or useful were following instructions, sounding good, and dealing with people. Student recruits to the workplace were expected to fit into the existing organisation of work and demonstrate customer facing personal skills. The four employers agreed that they did not want student recruits to organise work through planning activities, instructing others or detecting problems. All four employers added ‘confidence’ to their expectations of student recruits, and two employers also added ‘common sense’.

The findings of the pilot study led to five conclusions which were used to inform the literature review:

1. There was a clear consensus between the four diverse employers on which personal attributes were very useful in the workplace, and which personal attributes were not useful (section 2.2.1).
2. The employers emphasised that student recruits should be able to contribute to the existing organisation of work, rather than organise work (section 2.2.2).
3. Employers identified appropriate personal attributes of employability in the recruitment process and relied upon induction programmes to transform the student recruit into an employee (section 2.2.2.)

4. Employers expected schools to prepare student recruits for entry to the workplace (sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2).

5. Although three employers considered that work experience placements were useful in providing students with an opportunity to discover what a career involved, there was no suggestion that placements could be used to develop student employability, and school was expected to provide suitable candidates (section 2.3.3).

3.2.3. As a researcher, somewhere between an insider and an outsider

Having spent my teaching career at The Old School, I could be considered an insider researcher. My commitment to the school stemmed from a conviction that students from a restricted socio-economic background should have the same opportunity for a beneficial education as student whose parents were able to afford a fee paying school, such as my own Direct Grant School. As a subject teacher, Head of History, Head of Year, Acting Deputy Head, and provider of a variety of extra-curricular activities, I contributed to the transformation of the school from a struggling comprehensive school to an Ofsted rated ‘Outstanding’ school (2015). As Head of Sixth Form for two years, I worked to maintain its integrity, and encouraged students to enter university.

Although my investment in The Old School meant that it proved difficult to adopt the detached perspective of a researcher, my association with the case study school proved to be an advantage in that, “case studies allow us to look at the world through the researcher's eyes and in the process, to see things we may otherwise have not seen,”(Donmoyer, 2002, p.63). An example was the multi-ethnic nature of the sixth-form intake (Appendix A) which, in my professional experience, was not an issue in the delivery of the school curriculum. All students were seen by the staff as individuals, rather than as members of an ethnic community.

Being an insider meant being embedded in a shared setting with the students and staff I interviewed, with a, “feel for the game and the hidden rules,” (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 27). As a recent colleague of the Futures programme co-ordinator and several of the sixth-form tutors, and a recent Head of Year of many of the students, I had belonged to the school community of
practice. Familiarity proved beneficial in placing my interviewees at their ease, and avoided the suspicion of motivation which could be attached to an outsider. It was noticeable that when I interviewed unfamiliar A-level female students, they were initially concerned to ask me questions to discover the purpose of the study and my previous connection with The Old School, but once reassured they were relaxed in answering questions and developing their opinions.

Nevertheless, I initially found it difficult escape the dilemma identified by Floyd and Arthur, that a practitioner is engaged in an organisation, whereas a researcher needs to stand back and survey evidence (2012, p.176). It was only over time, after retirement, that was I able to become sufficiently detached from the school community of practice to adopt a circumspect approach to the impact of the Futures programme on student employability. However, as Finlay (1988) observed, objectivity assumes an unequivocal reality which does not exist in social science research. As a social science researcher I was unlikely to escape an inherent bias because of my own social construct of reality, as Rose advised, “there is no neutrality, there is only greater or less awareness of one’s biases” (1985, p.77). I found that I was able to recognise my own bias and avoid being judgemental, especially when interviewing members of staff, by recognising that my own approach to being a tutor and a Head of Year had been derived from my uncommon socio-economic background.

As a researcher, I was able to position myself somewhere between an insider and an outsider. My previous professional involvement with the school laid a foundation of trust between myself and my interviewees, however my detachment from the community of school practice enabled me to avoid being judgemental towards their comments. The knowledge gained from the literature review (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009), in addition to being distanced from sixth-form community of practice, allowed me to place the Futures programme in context, i.e. as a response to statutory provision for vocational education, rather than a sixth-form initiative which contributed to student lifelong learning. Equally, as an experienced practitioner, I realised that unless the implications of the research could be incorporated into existing pedagogic practice, they would have little impact on sixth-form vocational education, without the transformation of DfE expectations of sixth-form students. In the next section I explain how my interview sample was a product of existing practice.

3.2.4. A purposive sample
The research samples of staff and students were purposive samples, following the advice of Bryman that, “the researcher samples on the basis of wanting to interview people who are relevant to the research questions” (2004, p.334). The staff sample (table 3.6.) was composed of the Futures programme co-ordinator and the sixth-form tutors, who seemed more likely to know the personal attributes of the students than subject teachers. Letters were emailed to both the co-ordinator and the sixth-form tutors to invite them for interview (Appendix J).

Table 3.6. The Interview sample of sixth form staff with approximate age to reflect experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Futures co-ordinator: Janice (30s), teaching for 6 years in The Old School after a career in an international law firm.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 13 Form Tutors</td>
<td>Year 12 Form Tutors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve (30s): first school, teaching for 8 years.</td>
<td>Greta (20s): previous sixth form tutor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben (50s): considerable previous experience.</td>
<td>Elaine (20s): first teaching post.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol (30s): second school as sixth form tutor.</td>
<td>Tim (30s): previous sixth form experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John (40s): considerable previous experience.</td>
<td>Karen (20s): previous sixth form experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane (20s): first teaching post.</td>
<td>Pam (50s): experienced sixth form tutor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike (20s): previous teaching experience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The student sample (tables 3.7. and 3.8.) provided male and female BTEC and A-level focus groups, which represented the ethnically diverse sixth-form intake.

Table 3.7. The interview sample of sixth form students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Year 12 BTEC students</th>
<th>Year 12 A-level students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sami, Peter, Mohammed, Alex, Tariq</td>
<td>Ali, Sahin, Sean,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Kim, Dacey, Yasmin, Hannah</td>
<td>Agatha, Liselle, Amara, Gulzan Adel, Katie,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It was not my original intention to identify a purposeful sample of students, but to identify a stratified random sample from the 2015-16 intake, stratified by ethnicity, gender, course of study, and year, in order to provide a cross-section of the student body (table 3.8.).

A letter of invitation was written to each student in a random sample (Appendix J), and I asked the Head of Sixth-Form to give the letter to each student during a sixth-form assembly in order to encourage a collaborative approach to the research within a relational ethical framework (see table 3.11). However none of the students appeared for interview at the allocated time. I had failed to appreciate that student timetables were spread across five schools within the sixth-form consortium to which The Old School sixth-form belonged, and that students were unlikely to be available at any pre-arranged time.

Table 3.8: Intended and actual sample of sixth form students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended sample</th>
<th>Reason for intended sample</th>
<th>Actual sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 BTEC female students.</td>
<td>Students studying BTEC subjects were more likely to consider the immediate prospect of employment.</td>
<td>2 BTEC groups (5 male / 4 female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 BTEC male students.</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 A-level groups (3 male / 6 female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 A-level female students.</td>
<td>To avoid students of one gender dominating answers or dialogue.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 A-level male students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12: 8 students</td>
<td>Year 12 and Y13 students were likely to have different perspectives on preparation for employment</td>
<td>Y12 students (18 students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 13: 12 students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20 students)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My actual sample of 18 students (table 3.8) was stratified by gender to avoid one gender dominating the interviews, and by course of study to provide the students in each group with a common identity. The students chosen for interview were those who were timetabled to be taught by the Futures programme co-ordinator on the two half-days which had been arranged for the interviews. The change in the sample of students from the intended sample reflected Emmel’s observation that sampling could be, “designed before the research starts, and may be
redesigned as the research progresses. It is not driven forward by theoretical categories, but practical and pragmatic considerations” (2013, p.33). By recognising practical and pragmatic considerations, the research was seen to be an extension of school vocational education provision.

My professional experience had convinced me that any sample of students from the sixth-form intake would express a variety views and opinions, echoing Battaglia’s observation that a representative sample of the population, “is often accomplished by applying expert knowledge of the population to select in a non random manner a sample of elements that represents a cross-section of the population” (2008, p.645). The students in the sixth-form were not defined by their ethnicity since the intake was from a very mixed ethnic background (Appendix A). Although female students found themselves in a minority, the strength of female presence on the sixth-form teaching staff (including the Head of Sixth-Form and the Futures co-ordinator) avoided sixth-form gender bias.

Knowing the culture of The Old School proved to be beneficial in choosing an appropriate student sample, as Hammersley’s argued, “in practice, many recent qualitative researchers have routinely produced accounts which employ concepts – such as class, gender, and ethnicity – in ways that refer to properties of social structure whose character is potentially independent of whether, or how actors actually experience them; and sometimes these concepts are at odds with actors' perceptions” (2007, p.47). Although the workplace community of practice may include an ethnic and gender bias, which may impact on student employability, concern over bias in the workplace was not evident in the response of staff and students to interview questions. The next section describes the collection of data.

3.2.5. Collection of data

The collection of data was spread over 3 years (table 3.9). Having retired from being a Head of Year in 2013, I worked as a part-time cover teacher for 2 years in order to be available for face-to-face interviews with partnership employers for the pilot study, the Futures programme co-ordinator, and the sixth-form tutors, at a time of their convenience. In the third year, the sixth-form students were interviewed in four focus groups at the end of term, once their timetable commitments had come to an end.
Being familiar with the culture of The Old School, I was confident of establishing a relaxed relationship with my interviewees; Davison observed that, “methodological literature on qualitative research consistently endorses the advantages of close relationships with respondents which will enhance rapport and enrich research findings” (2004, p.381). A shared experience of The Old School with both staff and students enabled me to place their responses to interview questions in the context of the school’s expectations of both students and staff. I was able to follow the advice of Dwyer and Buckle, “to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one’s participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience,” (2009, p.59). I was able to avoid questioning the meaning the students derived from their sixth-form experience through reference to my own knowledge of the workings of the education system, except to question the perception of one student (gained from her teacher) that a BTEC qualification could not be used for entry to university.

Table 3.9. Interview schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Purpose of interview</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>Pilot study- employer expectations of student recruits.</td>
<td>4 employers in the partnership with the Futures programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2014</td>
<td>Futures programme approach to student employability.</td>
<td>Programme co-ordinator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>Tutor perceptions of student employability.</td>
<td>11 out of 12 sixth form tutors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2015</td>
<td>BTEC student experience and perceptions of employability.</td>
<td>1 group of 4 male students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 group of 6 female students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2016</td>
<td>A-level student experience and perceptions of employability.</td>
<td>1 group of 4 male students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 group of 4 female students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The literature review suggested the study’s three research questions (figure 3.1.). The first research question was addressed through group interviews with students, the second research question was addressed through individual interviews with the sixth-form tutors, and the third research question was addressed through both group interviews with sixth-form students and individual interviews with tutors.

Figure 3.1. The link between interview data and the study.
3.2.6. Individual and group interviews

Qualitative research data was collected through individual interviews with sixth-form tutors and group interviews with sixth-form students. The four student groups could be described as focus groups to extent that they were intended to encourage discussion and articulate a range of opinions related to various aspects of student employability (Vaughn et al., 1996). In contrast, each tutor was intended to provide an individualised view of student employability based upon his/her previous and present social experience.

It would be difficult to compare the validity (Morgan 2001) of their responses since they represented different perspectives within the sixth-form community of learning. The sixth-form tutors were presently employed, but they were detached from the delivery of Futures programme; the students were preparing for employment and were recipients of the Futures programme. The responses of each tutor could be considered valid since they were not influenced by other tutors being interviewed at the same time, however student responses in each focus group could also be considered valid because discussion meant that they reflect a shared experience of the Futures programme and expectations of future employment. Both tutors and students belonged to the sixth-form community of practice and shared the common sixth-form perception that academic learning and qualifications were the purpose of sixth-form education. Therefore, both tutor and student perceptions could be considered equally valid, but from a different standpoint.

The validity of tutor responses was likely to be influenced by their working relationship with sixth-form colleagues, while the validity of the responses of the students was likely to be influenced by untested perceptions of employability. In his consideration of methods of conducting interviews, Morgan concluded that, “rather than claiming that one set of results is more valid than the other, it makes more sense to treat each method as more useful for some purposes and less useful for others,” (2001, p.154). Individual interviews with tutors provided data which was informed by each tutor’s social construct of the reality of education and employment, whereas students provided data which reflected shared expectations of post-sixth-form destinations and employment.
It would require a separate study to investigate whether the individual tutor interviews were more or less ‘natural’ than the student group interviews (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The study did not investigate the extent to which responses were influenced by being interviewed in the school environment, although social constructionism suggests that knowledge is acquired through the sixth-form community of practice. Both student and staff interviewees represented purposeful samples (see section 3.2.4.) and therefore both reflected their participation in the sixth-form (Bryman, 2004). However, there were differences of perception within each purposeful sample. One-to-one interviews with tutors uncovered a difference between those tutors who were new to the sixth-form and less inclined to criticise existing provision for vocational education, and the more secure tutors who were inclined to resent a lack of involvement in the Futures programme. The students in the focus group interviews who had chosen not to follow the university route tended to be influenced by external factors.

The interviews explored the perceptions of both tutors and students while maintaining focus on the research questions. Although it was beyond the purpose of the study to investigate why interviewees responded to questions in the way they responded, both students and tutors were encouraged to express their views and opinions through the use of semi-structured interview questions.

3.2.7. Semi-structured interview questions

The use of semi-structured interview questions introduced flexibility to the interviews which enabled students and staff to respond to questions in their own way. In considering work based research, Costley et.al. advised that semi-structured interviews, “give participants more latitude in responding in their own words, but can also be focussed on using specific questions in response to a general answer” (2011, p.93). The order of the interview questions tended to be decided by the response of the interviewees, rather than follow a pre-determined order, although the same interview questions were included to maintain focus on the three research questions which emerged from the literature review (figure 3.1.).

It would be naive to assume that there was no power relationship between myself and my interviewees; Orb, et.al. observed that, “embedded in qualitative research are the concepts of
power between researchers and participants” (2001, p.93). In the interviews, I was asking the questions, I was able to direct the conversation, and I was able to interpret meaning in my analysis of the interview data. In considering work-based research, Kvale argued that, “the term interviewed dialogue is therefore a misnomer. It gives an illusion of mutual interests in a conversation, which in actuality takes place for the purpose of just the one part - the interviewer” (2006, p.483). Nevertheless, the topic of the research was an issue which engaged both students and staff. I was careful to point out to the participants that the research was not intended to be a critical analysis of the Futures programme, to avoid any suggestion that the interviewees were being asked to be critical of sixth-form provision for vocational education.

Shared experience of The Old School with those interviewed enabled me to follow the advice of Kvale and represent the views and opinions of those interviewed, “understanding the world from the subject’s points of view and to unfold the meaning of their lived world” (2006, p.481). Being familiar with the culture of the school enabled the analysis of the data to provide a reliable reflection of the views and opinions the staff and students of The Old School sixth-form. The first research question investigated sixth-form student perceptions and experiences of employability in order to discover the starting point for the development of student employability. Students were asked about their choice of a post-sixth form destination, their expectations of being an employee, and the personal attributes of employability, which would enable them to make to transition to being an employee. The same 6 questions were put to the four focus groups of students, although the order of the questions depended upon student responses:

1. What do you intend do after the sixth-form?
2. Why did you choose your post sixth-form destination?
3. What do you expect to gain from full-time employment?
4. What do you think will be expected of you as an employee?
5. Would you change jobs until you found one that was suitable for you?
6. Do you expect to find any barriers in the workplace?

The second research question investigated sixth-form tutor perceptions and experiences of being a tutor, of student work readiness, and the potential of sixth-form tutors to develop student employability. Each sixth-form tutor was asked the same six semi-structured questions
in face-to-face interviews, although the order of questions was dependent on the response of each tutor:

1. What do you think is your role as a sixth-form tutor?
2. How would you describe your relationship with your tutor group?
3. How do you think the sixth-form is different to the workplace?
4. How does your experience of the workplace outside school help you to support students in preparation for entry to a workplace?
5. Do you think students are aware of their employability?
6. Do you think that work experience placements benefit students?

The students were also asked:
1. What support do you expect from your form tutor?’

The third research question explored the link between statutory careers guidance and the Futures programme, considered the contribution of work experience placements, provided by the programme, and the development of student employability. While documentary evidence was used to describe the aims and objectives of the programme, questions to the programme co-ordinator investigated the application of the programme, questions to tutors explored their perceptions of the impact of the programme, and questions to the students considered student experience of the Futures programme.

**Documentary evidence of the Futures programme:**
1. The 2016 policy of the Futures programme (Appendix D).
2. The 2016 annual workshop proposal (Appendix H).

**Questions to the Futures co-ordinator:**
1. What do you see as the purpose of the Futures vocational education programme?
2. How do you think that the programme contributes to student post sixth-form progression?
3. Have you been able to develop partnerships with employers?
4. What do you see as the benefit of a work experience programme?
5. How do you think that the Futures programme could be improved?
Questions to sixth form tutors:
1. What is your impression of the Futures programme?
2. How do you think work experience benefits student employability?
3. How do you think that the Future programme could be improved to prepare students for employability?

Questions to sixth form students:
1. How did you decide on your post sixth-form destination?
2. How have you benefitted from a work experience placement?
3. How do you think that the Futures programme could be improved?

My previous professional relationship with the interviewees enabled them to feel at ease in answering the interview questions and expressing their own views and opinions. As a Head of Year 9, I had led a team of 5 form tutors in previously organising the male students to follow school procedures and meet school expectations. Significantly, the female sixth-form students wanted to be re-assured by my association with the school before they were prepared to participate in the research. Since I had shared the school culture with the sixth-form staff and students, I could be considered a participant in the research.

As a participant, I was able to interact with sixth-form students and staff. A conversational approach encouraged the interviewees to express their own views and opinions (Bryman, 2004, p.320). Follow up questions were used much more in the student focus group interviews than in the one-to-one staff interviews, since the tutors were more guarded in their response, perhaps because they were conscious of their professional responsibility as members of the sixth-form staff representing The Old School. The next section explains how the interview data was analysed.

3.2.8. An Overview of data analysis

The data analysis adopted the process suggested by Braun and Clarke (table 3.10). The findings from the interview data are discussed in the next three chapters, with reference to quotes from sixth-form staff and students and the appendices.
Chapter 4 considers student perceptions of employability through investigating the employability of student post sixth-form destinations, student expectations of being an employee, and students awareness of their personal attributes of employability (see table 4.1). Chapter 5 investigates staff perceptions and experiences of employability and the capacity of sixth-form tutors to support student employability by examining tutor perceptions being a sixth-form tutor, perceptions of the readiness of students to enter the workplace, and the potential of tutors to develop student employability (see table 5.1.). Chapter 6 examines the impact of statutory careers guidance on staff and students by investigating the link between the Futures programme and statutory guidance (Appendix C), and the contribution of the Futures work experience programme to student employability (see table 6.1.).

Table 3.10. The process of data analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.87)

1. Familiarizing yourself with your data
   Transcribing interviews with the Futures programme co-ordinator, 18 sixth-form students and the 11 sixth form tutors. Then reading and re-reading the data to note initial ideas for coding.

2. Generating initial codes:
   Coding features of the transcribed interview data to reflect the three research questions suggested by my literature review.

3. Searching for themes:
   Collating codes into potential themes, which addressed each of the three research questions, and gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.

4. Reviewing themes:
   Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, then generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis in the form of three flow diagrams for each research question.

5. Defining and naming themes:
   An ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme,

6. Producing the report
   A selection of extracts from the transcribed data, which illustrated the findings from each theme, and a discussion of those findings.
The interview data from students and staff were recorded, transcribed and re-read to identify initial coding. The data was coded to address the study’s three research questions, and the coded data was collated into themes, which emerged from the coding process. The validity of the themes was checked for their relevance to the research questions. An ongoing analysis of the coded data refined the specifics of each theme, which were illustrated by extracts from the data.

3.3. The trustworthiness of the research

This study relies upon qualitative research, which has been criticised for lacking a rigorous approach because it relies upon interpretation rather than provable fact. However, it is arguable that both qualitative and quantitative research lack impartiality; Hammersley concluded that it is beyond dispute that qualitative and quantitative research, “does not involve simply applying a set of explicit and concrete rules of assessment. Instead they (researchers) make specific, implicit judgements in terms of methodological principles” (2007, p.289). A classic example being unable to recognise a scientific approach to research in physical science was the defence of ether by the eminent British physicist J.J. Thompson, more than four years after it was incontestably established that ether did not exist (Bryson, 2005).

The trustworthiness of the research of this study could conceivably result in a biased interpretation of data because of my long professional association with the case study school, and the reason for the choice of study stemmed from my own experience. However, as Emmel observed, qualitative research was, “quite capable, with the right methodological strategies of generating credible, reliable and useful theory derived from the qualitative investigation of social interaction” (2013, p.11). The methodological strategies applied to the research for this study are the four ‘trustworthiness’ guidelines (table 3.1) suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. The use of guidelines prevented the research findings from being a product of my own judgement, and tied the research to existing sixth form practice.

3.3.1 Credibility

The data was recorded, with the permission of those interviewed, and transcribed verbatim. Although each interviewee was offered the opportunity to read the transcription of their own
contribution to the data, none took up the offer, assuming that my intention was to faithfully record each response to the interview questions. This trust from both staff and students was arguably due to their familiarity with my previous professional experience. It was noticeable that the female students, who I had not previously taught, were only willing to answer questions once I had related my history with the school. My familiarity with the staff and students of the case study school meant that I was able to interpret the interview data within the context of the sixth-form (see section 3.2.3). In considering qualitative research, Hammersley observed that the insider research could interpret, “the diverse orientations of people involved in social activities; the way in which people actively make sense of their surroundings, and how this shapes what they do” (2000, p.394).

3.3.2. Dependability and transparency

A clear process was established to link all the aspects of the study. The structure of the literature review resulted not from the perspective of an educational practitioner, but from the perspective of the employers who took part in the pilot study. This was particularly important because the study has defined ‘employability’ as satisfying employer expectations (see p. 36). The study’s research questions emerged from the literature review. Although semi-structured interview views encouraged staff and students to express their own views and opinions, all sixth-form tutors were asked the same questions and each student focus group was asked the same questions. The views and opinions of participants were likely to be more freely expressed because the researcher was familiar to both students and staff, but free from direct involvement in the sixth-form or the school.

3.3.3. Confirmability

The study stemmed from the author’s own experience of making the transition from being a student to becoming an employee. This could suggest to the reader a subjective assumption of social constructivism which influenced the methodological decisions and the interpretation of data. Nevertheless, placing the study in the context of the author’s experience, including the case study school, provided the reader with the opportunity to make a judgement on the validity of the research. The confirmability of the research depends upon its internal validity in the eyes of the readership of the study, which is intended to be members of staff responsible
for the sixth-form vocational education. The use of a purposeful sample of staff and students, the implementation of statutory careers guidance through the Futures programme, and this researcher’s familiarity with the culture of The Old School has enabled the research to be based on existing practice.

3.3.4 Transferability

The transferability of the research depends upon its external validity, the extent to which it can be recognised as a product of existing sixth-form practice by sixth-form staff in other schools. Qualitative data has been criticised for failing to effectively inform policy making practice (Hillage and Pollard, 1998) because it cannot be reproduced, but the intention of the study it to provide research which is relevant to existing sixth-form practice. The number of English sixth-form students and staff and school sixth-forms provides an immense source of research data for the investigation of student employability, especially considering a constructive paradigm. The use of a single case study enabled the research to benefit from a defined context. However all sixth-form staff and students share the common context of an academic curriculum, the requirement of statutory careers guidance, and conditions of employment which emphasise the importance of personal attributes of employability. The implications of the research for The Old School sixth-form can prove of interest to other sixth-form staff and students, especially since the implications for the development of student employability require only an extension of existing practice.

The next section examines the ethical issues raised by the methodology and the limitations of the methodological approach.

3.5. Ethical considerations and limitations of the study

Ethical research is the responsibility of the researcher (Newby, 2014). If participants are encouraged to freely express their views and opinions, they can expect their identity to be protected in order to avoid the anxiety that those views and opinions would prejudice their relationships with others. In terms of this study, sixth-form students may become anxious that criticism may influence their academic support or their references for a post sixth-form destination, while sixth-form staff may become anxious that criticism may influence their
professional relationships. Since the study argues that the views and opinions of staff and students are the product of meaning constructed from social reality, the limitations of the study stem from the context of the study (see section 1.2.) This section considers both the ethical issues raised by the study, and the methodological limitations of the study.

3.5.1. Ethical issues

The research for the study followed the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) and satisfied the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee (OUHREC). Nevertheless there were ethical considerations which were particularly relevant to the research, especially protecting the identity of the sixth-form staff and students who participated in the research.

The views and opinions of the interviewees would not be mentioned to others in The Old School since the researcher no longer belonged to the school community of practice. Retirement from my professional association with The Old School, before I collected the data, meant that I could avoid, “murkier waters involving ongoing relationships, privileged knowledge and tensions”, between my role as a practitioner and a researcher (Floyd and Arthur, 2012, pp.7-8). This danger was highlighted by a previous colleague, who asked me about the content of an extended interview with an experienced tutor, which I was able to relate had included a conversation about the England rugby union team, without betraying any element of the conversation about the sixth-form. The students were primarily concerned that their tutors would provide positive references for their chosen post sixth-form destinations.

It was a significant ethical principal that the research had not been imposed upon the sixth-form staff or the students. Each tutor and student was given the opportunity not to be interviewed. Verbal consent for a recording of the interviews from those involved was secured before the interviews took place. Both sixth–form staff and students were interviewed at a time, and in a location, convenient for them, while anonymity was provided through pseudonyms ascribed to each participant when the interviews were transcribed. Each interviewee was given the opportunity to see a transcription of the data, although none asked to see their transcription.
Trust between researcher and participants in the research is also a key ethical principal (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009). I was given permission by the Headteacher of The Old School to use the school as a case study for research on student employability without being able to provide an outline of the research, but trusted that the study was not intended to be critical of the sixth-form. Without the trust of the Futures programme co-ordinator, I would have been unable to conduct a pilot study of partnership employers, gain an insight into the contribution of the programme to student employability, or interview a student sample; in return I was expected to respect the provision of the Futures programme.

A personal approach to the participants in the research proved far more productive than a formal request for an interview, emphasising that the research was a collaborative exercise. There was no response to my emailed invitation (Appendix J) to each tutor to participate in the research, but only one tutor refused to be interviewed when approached personally, perhaps because he/she felt marginalised in the school community of practice (Smythe and Hoolan, 2008). Equally there was no response to my invitations to individual students, but students were willing to participate in focus groups when directed by the Futures co-ordinator, having timed the interviews to coincide with her lessons.

It was an ethical necessity to treat the response of sixth-form staff and students as of equal significance (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009). Some participants were more comfortable than others with being interviewed. The staff who had previously been colleagues of mine were more relaxed that those who were new to the school, although face-to-face interviews meant that I could demonstrate that the interview was more of a conversation that a question and answer session. The students who I had previously taught were equally more comfortable in the focus group interviews. It was noticeable that the female students, who I had not previously taught, first wanted to be satisfied that I was an experienced practitioner at The Old School, whereas the male students were prepared to answer the interview questions from the beginning of the interview.

Although I had been a previous Head of Sixth-Form and Head of Year, the avoidance of being judgemental was also a significant ethical principle, following the advice of Orb, et.al. that, “the purpose of qualitative studies is to describe a phenomenon from the participants point of view” (2001, p.95). The student focus groups provided an example of respecting the opinions and
views of each participant. The BTEC students who had not gained entry to an A-level tended to question the value of a university education, but their responses were considered of equal value to the A-level students who argued for the benefit to employability of a university education. The research was a collaboration intended to develop student employability through use of the views and opinions of sixth-form staff and students. Given a conceptual framework of constructivism, respecting the views and opinions of the participants as equally valuable was an ethical imperative. My own perspective as a researcher was informed by the literature review as well as my own experience, and it was ethically important that the questions imposed no sensitive or unreasonable demands on the participants.

The interaction between researcher and participant could be best described as a relational framework (Flinders et.al. 1992), shown in table 3.11.

Table 3.11. Relational ethical framework (Finders 1992)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment</th>
<th>Collaboration with participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
<td>Avoidance of imposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting</td>
<td>Confirmation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next section identifies the limitations of the methodological approach to the research.

3.5.2. The limitations of the study

A primary limitation of the study was the particular context provided by the use of a single case study. Although The Old School sixth-form provided a manageable and defined context for the research, it could not avoid the sixth-form student and staff perceptions of employability being influenced by that context. The academic nature of the sixth-form assumed that student employability was improved by academic qualifications, with 76% of the 2015-16 Year 13 intake securing a university place (Appendix E). Although the Futures vocational education programme introduced work experience placements to provide an insight into the workplace, the programme was designed to satisfy statutory careers guidance (Appendix C). Following
statutory guidance, tutors were not involved in the delivery of the Futures programme. In the sixth-form curriculum, no time was allocated to develop student employability since it was assumed that this could be developed through transmitted knowledge.

It was perhaps impossible to avoid bias. Being an experienced practitioner from the case study school provided ease of access to staff and students, but it also meant that the research would include at least an unconscious bias. As a Head of Year, I had a clear conception of the role of the form tutor which is likely to have influenced my interpretation of data from tutor interviews, and having taught 4 A-level subjects in the past, I was likely to be impressed by academic achievement. Equally, although staff and student responses to the interview questions were given equal value, there was always likely to be a sub-text, which was beyond the remit of the study. For example, an experienced tutor was likely to be more critical of the Futures programme than a newly qualified tutor because the experience of the former was not used by the programme.

The use of a purposeful sample of students and staff (see section 3.2.4.) reflected the practice of the sixth-form and was tied to the culture of The Old School. The use of samples assumed that the collective sixth-form community of practice was more significant than the individualised meaning derived by the participants from their social experience, which included unique external factors. However it could be argued that the construction of identity as a sixth-form student or tutor depended upon the individual’s negotiation of multiple identities (Fejesa and Kopsenan, 2014) in order to belong to the sixth-form community of practice, and that both students and staff shared a collective identity.

The use of a pilot study ensured that the literature review included employer expectations instead of relying upon the perspective of an educational practitioner from The Old School’s community of practice. Nevertheless, the pilot study provided a restricted view in using employers from the inner city. These employers could recruit their students from a large population, and could expect employees to enter the workplace for the first time ready to meet their expectations. The employer consensus included work experience placements, which were not intended to develop student employability but to provide students with an opportunity to identify an appropriate career. Employers outside the inner city were likely to have a smaller population to draw upon, and were likely to be more discontented with the employability of
their student recruits. The final section of the chapter provides a summary of the methodology used in the study.

3.6. Summary

The conceptual framework of the research is founded upon an interpretivist paradigm, which recognises that each person has an individualised perception of social reality. Each student and tutor was seen as having a personalised perception and experience of employability, which could not be transformed by the positivist transmission of knowledge since an individualised construct of reality is incompatible with a positivist paradigm. The purpose of the study was not to devise a law of employability, but to design a strategy of employability for each student entering the workplace for the first time.

A case study approach to the research provided a defined context and a manageable population of sixth-form students and staff. The Old School sixth-form provided a suitable case study because it had introduced a Futures vocational education programme designed to satisfy statutory careers guidance. Although my previous professional investment in The Old School made bias a real issue, my previous lengthy professional association with the school provided ease of access to students and staff. To balance the perspective of an educational practitioner, a pilot study was used to provide an employer perspective on expectations of student employability. The four employers involved in the pilot study had established a partnership with the Futures programme, provided very diverse employment opportunities, and recruited students at different academic levels. The study revealed a common consensus that school should prepare students for the workplace, that student recruits should possess appropriate personal attributes of employability, and that work experience placements were intended to enable student to make appropriate career choices rather than develop student employability. The pilot study suggested the content of the second and third sections of the literature review, from which the three research questions of the study emerged.

The issue of researcher bias was mitigated by having retired at the time of the interviews, I had no present direct link with sixth-form staff and students, although I had retained a useful familiarity with the culture of The Old School, and I had a previous professional association with sixth form students and staff. Nevertheless, it took me several years, and a literature review,
to assume the objectivity of a researcher, for example viewing the school’s Futures programme as a response to statutory careers guidance rather than an inspired contribution to the sixth form curriculum.

Data for the research relied on interviews with a purposive sample of sixth-form staff (n=12) and students (n=18) rather than a theoretical stratified random sample. The first interview was with the sixth-form Futures vocational education programme co-ordinator to discover the application of the programme. The sample of sixth-form staff contained all but one of the form tutors and the Futures programme co-ordinator, since they seemed most likely to know student personal attributes and have a perception of student employability, and they were interviewed individually. A purposeful sample of sixth-form students was interviewed in 4 focus groups, stratified by gender and course of study to encourage them to feel comfortable with their student colleagues.

The data from the interviewees with sixth-form students and staff were used to address the first two research questions and interview data plus documentary evidence from the Futures programme was used to answer the third research question. The recorded interview data was transcribed and coded, re-read in order to identify themes which were related to the research questions, and a selection of transcriptions from the data was used to provide a discussion of the findings for each theme.

The research followed four guidelines to ensure its trustworthiness. The first guideline of credibility came from the link between the case study and the researcher, based upon a common understanding of the culture of the school. The second guideline was dependency and transparency, which stemmed from the revelation of employers’ expectations by the pilot study, and which determined the structure of the literature review. The third guideline was confirmability, which stemmed from the internal validity of the research, with both the participants and the researcher steeped in the culture of The Old School. The fourth guideline of transferability could be found in statutory guidance and the conditions of employment which influenced other sixth form students and staff.

The ethical considerations of the research revolved around the issue of trust between researcher and participant, since both students and staff were encouraged to express their own
views and opinions through semi-structured interview questions. The ethical framework for the research was a relational model of collaboration between researcher and participant, with the research not being imposed on the participants, and the reporting of the research providing confirmation that the contributions of each participant were given equal consideration. The methodological limitations of the research stemmed from the use of the defined context of the case study, and from the identification of themes from the research data in order to manage a constructivist approach. The next three chapters investigate the findings of the research, and discuss those findings for each research question.
Chapter 4. Findings and discussion of RQ1: What are the sixth-form student perceptions and experiences of employability in a UK sixth form?

Introduction

This chapter analyses and discusses the data from interviews with four groups of students (n=18) which addressed the first research question: What are sixth-form student perceptions and experiences of employability? The data were recorded, transcribed, and re-read to enable familiarity before being coded (figure 4.1.). Three themes emerged from the coding process and these themes were then reviewed to ensure that they focussed on the research question. (see table 4.1.). A selection of extracts, in italics, from the transcribed data is used to illustrate the findings from each theme accompanied by a discussion of those findings.

Figure 4.1. Initial coding of sixth form student responses for RQ1

| Benefit of H.E | Benefit of a Higher Apprenticeship | Benefit of full-time employment | - Student loan | - Not yet ready to enter workplace | - Expect to enter preferred workplace | - Importance of interview technique | - Difference between sixth form and workplace | - used to interacting with others | - expect to enter preferred workplace | - motivation as an employee | - self-reliance | - importance of income | - importance of job satisfaction | - prepared to move jobs | - opportunity for promotion | - working your way up the promotion ladder | - working in a team | - change over time as an employee | - barriers in the workplace |

Table 4.1. Emerging themes for RQ1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1: Employability of sixth-form destinations</th>
<th>Theme 2: Student expectations of being an employee</th>
<th>Theme 3: Student personal attributes of employability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Higher Education.</td>
<td>1. Income.</td>
<td>1. Interaction with work colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The cost of a degree.</td>
<td>3. Promotion</td>
<td>3. Being prepared to act as an agent of change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The rest of the chapter is organised into 4 sections, one for each for each of three themes, with sub-sections for each specific, and a fourth section for a summary of the findings and discussion. The first theme (section 4.1) considers student choice of three post sixth-form destinations, (university, Higher Apprenticeship or employment) and the extent to which a degree is worth the cost of student fees. The second theme (section 4.2) examines student expectations of being employed, and the compatibility of student recruits with the workplace. The third theme (section 4.3.) investigates student perceptions of their personal attributes of employability, being prepared for the workplace, and being prepared to act as agents of change. The final section is a summary of the findings and discussion of those findings (4.4.).

4.1. Theme 1: The employability of post sixth-form student destinations

Sixth-form students from The Old School chose one of two post sixth-form pathways: entry to university, or a Higher Apprenticeship. From the 2015-16 Year 13 intake, 57 students (76%) secured a university place, and 10 students secured a higher apprenticeship or employment, or intended to have a gap year (Appendix E). The percentage of students who secured a place at university (Appendix E) was the outcome for the majority of sixth-form students, suggesting that that sixth-form was geared to academic achievement and the continuation of education.

4.1.1. Higher Education

Sixth-form students assumed that entry to university would lead to a preferred career. Agatha, Alex and Adel thought that university entry was the aim of Further Education and would result in a wider choice of career opportunities and better preparation for employment:

“Well, I mean I would be good at doing these kinds of subjects to go to university because I would enjoy these subjects. I would have a basic knowledge of law anyway. And I have shown that a GCSEs and A-levels, I can do well academically. So with a subject I thoroughly enjoy and can do well and get a degree” (Agatha, A-level student).

“Hoping to go to university .... I haven’t decided what course I’m going to do yet.... probably get some managerial position.... I want to be successful and want to have those options open for the future, so rather than get a job just now and, like, know where I’m going, have some form
of education to carry on up the steps.... I’m hoping that with a qualification it’ll be a lot quicker. When I get into that position, I’ll have a better idea how to do it” (Alex, BTEC student).

“But a degree, you’re talking about an initiative through education to improve yourself, and that’s why it seems a very big thing in this market today” (Adel, A-level student).

Kim considered her academic aspiration to be more important than her mother’s apparent concern that she translated academic achievement into employment:

“My mum said to me about doing an apprenticeship, but I said I definitely wanted to go to university and get myself a degree, and she said like OK, but she just wanted me to know like I can do an apprenticeship.... if I was to go to university and get a qualification which allows me to go into a lot of different things, and if I wanted to change my mind, maybe I could work in a different place and I wouldn’t have to work in business but work somewhere else” (Kim, BTEC student).

Both BTEC students and A-level students made the same assumption, that a university degree would provide a passport to preferred employment and promotion, and enhance their employability. This was unsurprising since progression through the education system is based upon academic achievement. However, occupational competency has come to depend upon personal attributes of employability, which Bourdieu (1986) argued are inherited in the form of cultural and social capital (see section 2.1.2.), as well as the technical skills derived from academic qualifications. Although university life introduces students to unfamiliar others in unfamiliar social situations, the impact of university on developing student personal attributes appears limited since students will primarily interact with other students, which may develop their sense of being a student.

The development of personal attributes in the university learning environment also needs to be translated into employability once the student recruit enters a full-time workplace. Hichliffe and Jolly (2011) observed that many universities have adopted Personal Development Plans (PDPs), but that, “in the absence of a concept of identity, PDP simply ends up as another method of disciplining, rather than empowering the self.... the reason for this is that the PDP approach usually succumbs to a list-approach to employability, in which attributes are to be identified,
developed and ticked off,” (p.566). The student recruit cannot know how to apply personal attributes to join the workplace community of practice until he/she experiences the social situation of the workplace community of practice (section 2.1.5.). The concept of situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) argues that students cannot exercise personal attributes of employability until they become full-time employees and immerse themselves in the workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5). It is the capacity for self-efficacy (Pinquart et.al.) which is likely to determine the student recruit’s employability. However, post-sixth form progression to a Higher Apprenticeship and employment offers an opportunity to continue education and exercise self-efficacy in joining a workplace.

4.1.2. Higher Apprenticeship and employment

Post-sixth form progression to a Higher Apprenticeship or employment was an alternative destination for sixth-form students at The Old School, but only 10 students (13%) from the 2015-16 research cohort chose this alternative. The attraction of Higher Apprenticeships is that they provide on-the-job training while studying for a level 4 or 5 qualification (Skills Funding Agency, 2016). Tariq claimed that a Higher Apprenticeship would prepare students for the workplace better that a university degree:

“With a three year degree you are not going to build on these skills (expected by the employer) The aim of whether you go to university or apprenticeship is whether you get a job, and if you don’t work part time you don’t build these skills when you leave university. Employers will turn you away if you don’t have these practical skills.... transferable skills through hands on approach whereas university is always intellectual.... you don’t really get a feel for the job and the world of work really.... I got taken out of A-levels and I chose BTEC Business because of the pathway which you can go through afterwards and on top of that the experience you can get. I just thought it would be best to go through the financial sector because that’s what I was looking to go into” (Tariq, BTEC student).

However, Tariq’s perception of the value of a Higher Apprenticeship may have been influenced by being taken out of A-levels and placed on a less academic but more vocational BTEC course, although he assumed that the most significant transferable skills were technical skills rather
than personal attributes of employability. Sami also favoured a Higher Apprenticeship from the meaning he had derived from his social experience:

“I’ve got mates who have gone to university, they’ve come out and they’ve started an entry level job, which to me is looking a waste of time” (Sami, BTEC student).

The influence of socio-economic background was suggested by Peter, who was attracted to a Higher Apprenticeship because it allowed him to acquire technical skills, to earn an income and to provide an entry to full-time employment:

“After this I’ll probably be looking for an apprenticeship. There’s an increase in the creation of higher level of apprenticeship so I can still learn and get paid and still get a feeling for the world of work.... After the apprenticeship has finished you can sometimes get an offer to work full time within that company, or if you don’t get that you’ve at least got the skills to find a similar job role within a different company..... you get shown how to do the job, you basically get shown all the skills you need to carry out the job....I wouldn’t have to study any more ...a hands on approach which is sometimes best suited for different kinds of people like BTEC against A-level....After the apprenticeship has finished you can sometimes get the offer to work fulltime with that company, or if you don’t get that at least you’ve got the skills to find a similar job role within a different company.... I like an apprenticeship because if you do an apprenticeship in ICT then you can learn on the job. .... There’s an increase in higher level of apprenticeships so I can still earn and get paid.... It’s all about the amount of pay and the amount of success that you’re going to get through each avenue after college” (Peter, BTEC student).

The choices of Tariq, Sami and Peter may reflect the influence of external factors, but they may also reflect being placed on a more vocational BTEC course of study and a lack of self-confidence in their capacity to apply themselves to a workplace without learnt technical skills. Although the Social Mobility Commission (2017) advised that the focus of formal educational should shift from qualifications to employability for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who had limited social capital, the 2017 report of the Education Funding Agency implied that such a change in DfE education policy is unlikely. The educational social construct which suggests that employability depends upon the acquisition of academic qualifications remains intact, despite employers recognising the importance of personal attributes of employability (CBI, 2016).
Although Alex was intent upon translating his education into income and directly enter employment, he saw a university education as necessary for promotion to a managerial position:

“I think that when it gets down to it, it’s all about the amount of pay and the amount of success you’re going to get, through each avenue after college (sixth form) .... After I’ve completed BTEC I’m getting out of education for a year, or a couple of years, and I’m getting straight into employment in firms that do not require a degree .... They will take you on and they will give you the experience and training for you to go up the ladder and get into these managerial positions, where you are paid a considerable amount of money... If you make a commitment to a course for three years in a course like a degree, then you find out there after three years you are not experienced, then you go out into the workforce and you won’t potentially get the position due to experience. I believe if you get off education for a couple of years or a year, get that experience and find that you need these qualifications, like a degree qualification, to get onto a managerial positions, then you have a choice yourself” (Alex, BTEC student).

However, there is mounting evidence that some employers prefer to train student recruits to contribute to their organisation of work, rather than relying upon H.E. to provide relevant technical knowledge. The Futures programme co-ordinator discovered that some local employers preferred to recruit school leavers, rather than employ graduates (see p.145), whose degree might be superfluous to the organisation of work. Surplus qualifications for jobs is becoming commonplace (Howieson, 2012), nevertheless, 76% of the research cohort secured a university place (Appendix E), and assumed it would lead to a preferred career, despite the cost of a degree.

4.1.3. The cost of a degree

The abolition of student grants and the continued rise in the ceiling for tuition fees has not dissuaded students from securing a university place (Appendix E). However the cost of a degree encouraged one BTEC focus group to consider alternatives to H.E. in their choice of post sixth-form destination:
“You can do a sandwich degree which allows you to be paid and gives you experience, so that when you leave with a degree you will have experience, and it’s a lot easier to get back into that area of work” (Sami, BTEC student).

“In a sandwich course you get a one year placement, but that is after three years have gone. You are paying for those three years.... you have to pay back the student loan of what, £9000 per year, that comes to you paying over 25 grand on a course that, you know, you might not wanted to do afterwards” (Peter, BTEC student).

“But you still have a student loan, which really and truly is now getting bigger because they removed the grants so that you have to pay everything... we are probably expected to be at our parents house until the age of 40, we can’t afford a mortgage, and I don’t know” (Mohammed BTEC student).

Sami had expressed concern about the value of a degree, based upon the experience of his friends (see p.100) and he argued that a sandwich degree would provide both workplace experience and a source of income. However Peter and Mohammed considered that a degree was too expensive, especially when accompanied by an uncertain employment outcome. Nevertheless, according to UCAS (University and College Application Service 2017), the largest group of applicants in 2017 were 18 year olds from the UK, and in contrast to figures for older age groups, applicant numbers from this group were similar to the previous year at 272,330, despite a fall of 1% in the 18 year old population. The decision as to whether or not a university degree is worth the financial investment involved seems to depend upon student expectations of being able to translate a degree into satisfactory employment, which is considered in the second theme.

4.2. Theme 2: Student expectations of being an employee

The student’s willingness to apply self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) to engage with the workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5.) is likely to depend upon the expected benefits from employment. Since students are unlikely to have experience of full-time employment, student expectations of being an employee are likely to depend upon generalised perceptions. The most tangible reward for employment is income.
4.2.1. Income

From a survey of 357 UK students from 2 post 1992 universities, Gbadamosi et.al.(2015) concluded that the value of financial returns was more significant in career aspirations than personal factors, gender difference, family pressures, or personality traits. Katie argued that income was a necessary purpose of employment:

“Its work and you’re getting paid to do this at the end of the day. You do what you have to do to survive. You can’t just not work, you can’t just quit because that’s your livelihood gone. So I think you just have to get over it” (Katie A-level student).

Both A-level and BTEC students recognised income as a post education priority from the meaning they had derived from their social experience (Young and Collin, 2004):

“I think income is really important, you are going to have a new life and you’re not going to be dependent on your parents anymore” (Adel, A-level student).

“In my mentality it will be just going into work and doing what you have to do to get money.... I want property of my own and just live like to be quite relaxed and stable” (Hannah, BTEC student).

“I just don’t want to be struggling in the future financially. The best way to do that is to make as much money as you can.... I don’t want to have to complain about finance. I wouldn’t want that to be a problem which I have to bring up, but just have the money” (Alex, BTEC student).

Adel, Hannah and Alex valued income as a source of independence, a means of property ownership and an opportunity to be free of financial anxiety. However, income was not the overriding priority for other students.

4.2.2. Job satisfaction

Although Sahin and Liselle recognised the value of income, it did not replace the satisfaction which they expected to gain from being employed:
“Income is what runs the rest of your life. You need a good income, if you enjoy it and it brings you happiness, then it’s a good balance.... With income you can support a family, you can do things that you couldn’t do without income, but I’d want to be happy as well” (Sahin, A-level student).

“Well, I suppose income comes into it because you want to live off a steady amount, a disposable income that you can use to enjoy yourself with. Think it’s more like getting enjoyment from a job. I don’t want to be stuck in a job that I don’t enjoy. I think if I did that I wouldn’t do well in a job and the money wouldn’t seem worth it” (Liselle, A-level student).

Since Sahin and Liselle had no experience of full-time important, they expected to be able to combine job satisfaction and income. Three other students thought that job satisfaction would provide the motivation necessary to act as agents of change (see section 2.1.3) and apply themselves to the workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5.):

“I won’t be motivated to do something if I’m not enjoying it. I’ll put more effort into something I enjoy than something I don’t, then obviously there’s some task that you will do that you don’t enjoy but you still have to perform well, but if I enjoy it I’m going to put my heart and soul into it” (Kim, BTEC student).

“If you’re not earning that much and don’t enjoy it, then it’s not worth continuing to work there, but if you enjoy it, even if you’re not earning as much, then there’s still the motivation to keep working there, then maybe in future moving into a higher paid job to support family and so on” (Dacey, BTEC student).

“Think it’s more like getting enjoyment from a job. I don’t want to be stuck in a job that I don’t enjoy. I think if I did that I wouldn’t do well in a job and the money wouldn’t seem worth it” (Agatha, A-level student).

Kim, Dacey and Agatha considered enjoyment from employment as more valuable than income, suggesting that they came from a financially stable background in which income was not a significant issue. Sahin added that being unhappy in the workplace could lead to a reduction in occupational competency:
“I mean if you feel that you don’t like a certain position or you don’t enjoy the working environment then that could be difficult for you to work you would be less productive and you won’t be well motivated and you could potentially fail due to you not being well motivated, plus not meeting deadlines so if you are thinking of going straight into employment, find a position that suits you” (Sahin, A-level student).

Finding ‘a position that suits you’ suggests that the student should search for a compatible workplace, rather than act as an agent of change. It is perhaps unsurprising that those students whose socio-economic background has enabled them to focus on academic achievement would search for a compatible workplace, rather than consider income as being a priority. Although Katie had expressed the opinion that income was necessary, she did not consider it to be a priority:

“I think I see myself as working in a big multi-national business, maybe like Google, and work in management there, yes I think that’s what I would like to do, I’m not too sure yet, it’s just the kind of image I get.... they (Google) work with their employees much more, they give help to their needs a lot and I think it would be really cool” (Katie, A-level student).

Katie expected to work in management, and it was the prospect of promotion rather than income which provide the motivation for her choice of a workplace.

4.2.3. Promotion

Alex expected a significant salary and a position of responsibility, and assumed that these would be the reward for hard work:

“It’s just that being a manager has a better rate of pay, a lot more responsibility for myself. It doesn’t mean like I’m not being told what to do none stop like, I’m the person that makes my own decisions.... after 3 years 40 grand.... when you’re working so hard for it, expect after 3 years to be like that” (Alex BTEC student).

It would be interesting to discover whether or not failure to gain promotion, for whatever reason, would encourage Alex to seek other employment. None of the students expressed
concern that there would be social and/or cultural barriers to belonging to the workplace community of practice:

“For me business is on, but in the past it used to be male dominated. I have different views to what someone my age would have had 20 years ago ... I wouldn’t worry about being the only female there (in the workplace)” (Yasmin, BTEC student).

“They (school staff) let us know that as girls its fine and we don’t need to worry about gender and obviously the law is a lot different” (Katie, A-level student).

“It gives you a different outlook, living in the city. If you were talking to someone who lived in a more white dominated place and then came to the city they would have a different view, but for me I’ve always lived in the city and grown up around different ethnicities, so I’m quite intrigued by what other people have to say .... Everyone’s so open-minded now because the city’s so diverse,” (Dacey, BTEC student).

None of the sixth-form students who were interviewed expressed concern that they would encounter racism or sexism in the workplace. This may reflect the social and cultural meaning they have derived from living in a multi-cultural city, and/or studying in a multi-ethnic sixth-form (Appendix A). The Old School sixth-form has numerous female role models amongst the sixth form-staff, including the Head of Sixth-form and the Futures programme co-ordinator. Nevertheless, Dacey recognised that people in other parts of the country may have a different perspective. Students were prepared to move between workplaces in order to find a workplace which was compatible with their social expectations, following a national trend (Akkermans et. al. 2013; Wolf Report 2011).

4.2.4. Compatibility with the workplace

Liselle and Alex assumed that they would have an opportunity to change employment if they did not engage with their first workplace:

“The law is an interesting proposition for me and the income and everything is an added bonus, but even if it wasn’t very high, I would still be interested in going into it, you know, at least for
the beginning of my career, and obviously if it wasn’t sustainable then I might look to work elsewhere, but if I enjoyed the job, then I would want to stay in it.... Well if I didn’t like it, I would walk out” (Liselle, A-level student).

“I wouldn’t want to stay with the same thing, I’d get a bit restive after a while, it would be boring, so I’d look for new opportunities” (Alex, BTEC student).

Liselle and Alex reflected the observation of the Wolf Report (2011) that students tend to change jobs during their 20s in search of a compatible workplace. Being able to identify a compatible workplace is likely to depend upon the student being prepared to act as an agent of change (section 2.1.3.) when he/she enters the workplace. Although, Ng and Feldman concluded that, “by equipping young adults with work-related skills and knowledge, vocational educational programs directly promote a high level of work role identification,” (2007, p.119), they ignored the impact of joining the workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5.). Identifying with the workplace includes identifying with the purpose of the workplace (Clarke, 2008), which might involve student recruits challenging their construct of social reality.

Despite a lack of workplace experience, students were aware that employment was not intended to satisfy the student recruit’s expectations of being employed. Mohamed recognised that being an employee involved identifying with the workplace:

“Just doing it for pay, it might be good pay but it will affect their clients, it will affect those they work for, it’ll bring the whole firm down and that will reflect within their work and gradually slow their possession down in the business,” (Mohammed, BTEC student).

In identifying with the workplace, Sahin, Tariq and Sean, expected to contribute to the organisation of work to satisfy employer expectations (Harvey, 2001).

“Yea, I feel like if you start from the bottom, you’ve got to work your way up. Nothing is going to be handed to you. You don’t start from the top; it just makes you work that much harder. You should do everything to your best standards ....I think the world of work is so competitive that what employers are basically looking for is what skills you have, what you can offer to the company” (Sahin, A-level student).
“It’s just being able to get that step through the door and for them to give you a chance and then you can see what job you really like and if they like you, because really it’s a relationship with between you and the company because they want you to be able to benefit them, and you want them to benefit your with skills, and you want to benefit them with success for their company. That’s just the basic relationship,” (Tariq, BTEC student).

“I would be afraid I would be fired if I wasn’t doing well enough. OK this guy is not doing well enough so we’ll sack him” (Sean, A-level student)

The social situation of the workplace meant that student recruits would have to interact with unfamiliar work colleagues and adapt to unfamiliar work practices in order to demonstrate occupational competency. The third theme investigates student perceptions of their personal attributes which can enable them to join the workplace community of practice.

4.3. Theme 3: Student perceptions of personal attributes of employability

Student perceptions of their personal attributes of employability were likely to be a product of the meaning they derived from their previous and present social experience (Young and Collin, 2004).

4.3.1. Interaction with workplace colleagues

Peter and Alex were confident that they understood the dynamics of the workplace and had sufficient personal attributes to interact with unfamiliar work colleagues:

“They love to talk behind people’s backs, like especially when you’re in a team, that’s your group, those are the people that have to spend the rest of your time with, and then I guess you are technically competing with other departments” (Peter, BTEC student).

“When you do a shift, say 7 or 8 hours, teams always need to communicate, you are not communicating if you are not in a team, so we talk about methods, techniques and how we can improve ourselves.... so it all depends upon the way the person works the way they feel the job
suits them, and the enjoyment really in a job, because someone who likes doing their job is going
to do much better at their job” (Alex, BTEC student).

However, interacting with work colleagues is different to interacting with a peer group. Yasmin
and Gulzan had a more considered view of joining the workplace community of practice (see
section 2.1.5), although they were also confident in their capacity to adapt:

“In firms a lot of people have different backgrounds but they have similar interests. It’s about
being able to get along with people.... but there’s always something everyone has in common. I
get along with everyone, that’s just me” (Yasmin, BTEC student).

“I’m used to being around people our age and we interact on a daily basis with teachers and
staff....You just have to adapt. Its work and you’re getting paid to do this at the end of the day.
You do what you have to do to survive. You can’t just not work, you can’t just quit because that’s
your livelihood gone. So I think you have to get over it” (Gulzan, A-level student).

Nevertheless, unless students were prepared for entry to the workplace, they would rely upon
a random compatibility with the collective social and cultural expression of the workplace
community of practice. The next section considers the need for students to act as agents of
change in order to become effective employees.

4.3.2. Being prepared for the workplace

Although a lack of life experience was seen by employers as the main reason for a lack of work
readiness amongst student recruits (UK Commission for Education and Skills 2014a), Kim and
Amara expected that the experience of being a university student would enhance their
employability:

“I’d prefer to be patient (and take a degree) until I’m ready to get into work” (Kim, BTEC
student).

“So I think as you go to university you just become a lot more independent and that allows you
to relate more, in the workplace you have to learn to interact a lot more, and I think that’s a
good thing” (Amara, A-level student).
However, student reliance upon university to develop attributes of employability seems to be misplaced because of the influence of external factors (Social Mobility Commission, 2017; Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2012) in developing personal attributes of employability. University is likely to extend experience of being a student rather than prepare the student to become an employee, whereas student recruits to the workplace are likely to rely upon situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) in order to demonstrate occupational competency. Agatha and Katie were aware that there was a difference between learning to be a successful student and learning to demonstrate occupational competency in the workplace:

“When you come into school you’re pretty much guided, but when you go into the workplace, you probably have maybe a week of training and you’re given something to do and you just do it, obviously you have your colleagues help” (Agatha, A-level student).

“You don’t get the same support like at college or secondary school” (Katie, A-level student).

Whereas students are supported throughout their sixth-form career to achieve their academic potential, employees are supervised in their contribution to the organisation of work (Ball, 2009). Sixth-form expectations of the student are different to employer expectation of the employee, and the student can expect to act as an agent of change (see section 2.1.3) on entering the workplace.

4.3.3. Being prepared to act as an agent of change

The importance of personal attributes of employability in meeting employer expectations (Harvey 2001) means that occupational competency is likely to depend upon the capacity of the student recruit to interact with unfamiliar work colleagues and adapt to unfamiliar work practices. Reliance upon self-efficacy is especially important in making the transition from being a student to becoming an employee because it, “influences the choice of learning tasks pursued, the degree of effort put into learning as well as perseverance in task execution,” (Luftenegger et. al., 2012, p.28).
Although sixth-form students seemed unlikely to appreciate the need to adapt to the workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5), Gulzan recognised that employment would have a significant impact on her, as an employee:

“I think as you get older you change. You work in a place; have work experience and think, that’s not for you. You just find another job..... the experiences you have will let you find out more about yourself and what interest you have, and that’s why you change” (Gulzan, A-level student).

Through participation in the workplace community of practice (Lave, 1986), the student recruit could expect to adjust identity (Tomlinson, 2007). However, identifying with the workplace is not as straightforward as developing a vocational habitus (see section 2.1.4), which can be a cognitive exercise. Although students recruits have the capacity to change their functioning (Sen, 1997) in order to adapt to the workplace environment, they will enter the workplace with a mix of existing life role identities (Ng and Feldman, 2007), which are likely to influence goal orientation (Lüftenegger, et. al. 2012) and expectations of the workplace. They can expect to reconcile their existing identities with the identity conferred upon them by belonging to the workplace.

Nevertheless, Sean and Tariq thought that they could demonstrate occupational competency without affecting a change of identity through interacting with work colleagues:

“If they didn’t like me because of the way I was, it wouldn’t matter as long as I could work with them, then it wouldn’t matter as much, but I would like to get on with people,” (Sean, A-level student)

“Personally I’m not interested in what other people think, you’ve got to think of yourself. .... You’re going to have to get along with people, but essentially you shouldn’t think about what other people think” (Tariq, BTEC student).

These comments suggest the extent to which student employability needs to be developed in the sixth-form, since the student recruit to the workplace cannot ignore work colleagues if he/she is to demonstrate occupational competency (Fejesa and Kopsena, 2014). Furthermore,
Maslow (1986) argues that sense of belonging to the workplace is important for the individual because it satisfies a human need for self-esteem and the esteem of work colleagues.

### 4.4 Summary

This chapter presented and discussed data which addressed the study’s first research question: ‘What are sixth form student perceptions and experiences of employability? A sample of students (n=18) were interviewed in four focus groups, their responses were roughly coded, and the codes were then refined and collated into three themes which emerged from the coding process.

The first theme investigated student perceptions of the employability value attached to the post sixth-form destinations of university entry, Higher Apprenticeship, and direct entry to employment. Both A-level and BTEC students assumed that entry to university was the desired outcome sixth-form education and would improve their employability. However, Harvey (2001) found that the impact of university on the development of student social and cultural capital was uncertain, which complemented Bourdieu’s (1986) argument that the value of academic qualifications are embodied in the student.

Despite the disadvantaged backgrounds of 34% of the student cohort, there was no poverty of aspiration from the focus groups, and the rising cost of entry to university did not dissuade sixth-form students from securing a university place, in line with the national trend (UCAS, 2017). Nevertheless, the introduction of university PDPs is unlikely to supplement a degree develop to enhance student employability (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011), since it ignores situated learning (Wenger and Lave 1991).

The second theme scrutinised student expectations of being an employee. Goal orientation (Luftenegger, 2012) is a significant factor in encouraging each student act as an agent of change and make the transition from student to employee. Without meaningful experience of the workplace, student social expectations focussed on the tangible benefits of employment. Although Gbadamosi (2015) considered income to be the primary benefit, students wanted to achieve a balance which included job satisfaction and the prospect of promotion. In order to achieve an attractive balance, students were prepared to change jobs, although they did not
expect racial or gender barriers to joining the workplace community of practice. Since the workplace tends to be geared towards market rationality rather than employer satisfaction (Clarke, 2008), employees can expect to compromise their expectations, act as agents of change, and adjust their identities (Tomlinson, 2007) to include the purpose of the workplace.

The third theme considered student perceptions of personal attributes required in the workplace. The student can expect to adapt to the unfamiliar social situation of the workplace. Being able to interact with teachers and other student in the learning environment of the sixth-form does not prepare students for interaction with unfamiliar work colleagues and adaptation to unfamiliar work practices. Employees can expect to contribute to the existing organisation of work and respond to supervision, rather than contribute the knowledge gained from academic qualification and the support of teachers to achieve to demonstrate occupational competency.

Student employability is likely to depend on student self-efficacy (Luftenegger, 2012), the capacity of each student to apply his/her personal attributes to join the workplace community of practice and satisfy the expectations of employers (Harvey, 2001). Consequently students can expect to be agents of change (see section 2.1.3) when they enter the workplace for the first time, including the construction of a vocational habitus (see section 2.1.3) a change of identity. The next chapter investigates the potential of the tutor to develop student employability.

Chapter 5. Findings and discussion of RQ2: What role do sixth-form tutors perceive they have in helping students to develop their employability?
Introduction

This chapter analyses and discusses the data from face-to-face interviews with sixth-form tutors (n=11), which addressed the second research question: ‘What role do sixth-form tutors perceive that they have in helping students to develop their employability? The data was recorded, transcribed, and re-read to enable familiarity before being coded (figure 5.1.).

Figure 5.1. Initial coding of sixth form tutor responses for RQ2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1: Tutor perceptions of a sixth-form tutor.</th>
<th>Theme 2: Tutor perceptions of student readiness to enter the workplace.</th>
<th>Theme 3: The potential of the sixth-form tutor to develop student employability.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Role of a tutor.</td>
<td>1. The limitation of academic qualifications in enabling student employability.</td>
<td>1. Tutor contribution to student employability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Tutor agency</td>
<td>2. Escaping the education bubble.</td>
<td>2. Other Influences on student employability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The relationship between tutor and student</td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Preparation for student entry to the workplace.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1. Emerging themes for RQ2

Three themes emerged from the coding process, and these themes were then reviewed to check their link to the research question. The themes included specifics which were then
defined and named (table 5.1). A selection of extracts from the transcribed data is used to illustrate the findings from each theme, accompanied by a discussion of those findings.

The rest of the chapter is organised into 4 sections, one for each theme, with sub-sections for each specific of the theme, and a final section for the summary. The first theme (section 5.1.) considers tutor perceptions of being a sixth-form tutor through the tutors’ understanding of the role of the tutor, tutor agency, and the relationship between tutor and student. The second theme investigates tutor perceptions of student readiness for the workplace, through the acquisition of academic qualifications and influence of the educational bubble (section 5.2.). The third theme examines the potential of tutors to develop student employability through advice, the influences on student employability beyond the reach of the tutor, and the preparation of students for entry to the workplace (section 5.3.). The final section provides a summary of the findings and discussion of those findings (5.4).

5.1. Theme 1: Tutor perceptions of being a sixth-form tutor

The formal role of the sixth-form tutor at the Old School was to register student attendance during a twenty-minute period at the beginning of four days during each week and a Year assembly on the fifth day. The tutorial time was an administrative convenience for student registration as well as providing an opportunity for tutors to get to know their students, support student progress through the sixth-form, and provide references for post sixth-form progression. Since statutory careers guidance did not include tutors (DfE 2014b), they were not involved in the Futures vocational education programme.

5.1.1. The Role of the tutor

The sixth-form tutor belongs to a pastoral team intended, “to support learning, enhance achievement, provide a secure base for pupils so they can learn to achieve,” (Rosenblatt, 2002, p.22). Although sixth-form tutors at The Old School were not given training, there was a collective understanding of their role, having entered a caring profession (see p.45), According to Lodge, “the most effective tutors are those who describe their role as ‘someone who helps them learn,” (2000, p.35). Greta, Karen and Ben had previous experience of being a tutor and clearly identified with this description:
“My role, apart from registering them, I think it would be to guide them, sort of keep track of how they are doing overall, because the class teacher can only keep track of their particular subject ... and I think, well I hope, these kids appreciate there is a broader range with the tutor when you can sort of say how each subject is doing, and what do you think you are going to do at the end of this year, and you can kind of touch on that and help them through A-levels” (Greta, Year 12 tutor).

“I see my role as a support role but focussed on what they are doing in school; In terms of being a day-to-day tutor, their achievements in school. More on a personal level, how they feel about what they are doing and what they feel they are achieving, giving them support where it is needed and required. Anything further I’d see as a wider pastoral programme” (Karen, Y12 tutor)

“To provide pastoral support to the student during two years .... You are a facilitator.... it’s just being someone they can trust and talk to, bounce and share ideas ... you don’t give them a definite answer, but, ‘have you thought of it from this perspective?’” (Ben Y13 tutor)

Although Elaine was in her first teaching post, she also assumed that role of a tutor was to support students through their sixth-form career:

“The role in registration hasn’t been written down for us...... Just find out any problems they’ve got.... With one of my students, we’d had a couple of serious meetings with the attendance officer and that really turned her around, to plan her week coming up.... I tend to advise them more for university and lifestyle, in terms of planning on how you organise yourself, more around the university stage” (Elaine Year 12 tutor).

Only two of the tutors were uncomfortable with getting to know their students, Diane because she lacked experience in her first appointment, and Steve because he was more interested in his academic subject:

“As a new teacher, I do feel that there would need to be some kind of guidance and programme in place so that I knew what I needed to do, aside from my own experience .I can’t work with some of them if they have quieter personalities .... When we have a discussion, it can be quite
difficult sometimes. Some students I feel I’ve got to know. I’ve tried different strategies, like trying to get them to discuss current issues, but again it was hit and misses, with some not turning up. I don’t feel like I’ve been able to get to know them well” (Diane, Y13 tutor).

“I see them every day, except assembly day (but) I still don’t believe that I build much of a relationship with them .... My main role is to promote my subject” (Steve, Y13 tutor).

Although Steve was the only tutor who stated that his role was primarily that of a subject teacher, he also said that he would be prepared to support a student if he was asked for help. It is also likely that Diane would become more able to interact with her students as she became more experienced as a tutor.

The potential influence of the form tutor was suggested by Bowlby’s ‘attachment theory’ (1988), with the student attaching himself/herself to the tutor as an adult who has successfully navigated a way through the formal education system and established a professional career. Tutors are also teachers who are, “actors able to draw upon a rich repertoire of experience .... and draw upon a greater range of responses to the dilemmas and problems of the present context” (Priestley et. al. 2015, p.4), in delivering the curriculum. In order to be an effective teacher, tutors cannot avoid interacting with their students.

However, the interaction between student and tutor, outside a subject lesson, can lead to a blurring of the tutor’s responsibilities, especially since social issues are likely to have an impact on student learning. Mike saw himself as a surrogate parent:

“To be to a go-to person. I think to provide a support for your group, but not just academic support, but support for other areas of life in whatever is troubling them. I am able to establish relationships with them, and I very much treat them as an adult and that’s me, especially with Year 13s, I treat them with respect; with a lack of respect, it falls apart. For me being a tutor is a different way (to being a teacher)... I would class my role as everything, as a parent” (Mike, Y13 tutor).
Nevertheless, Mike recognised that he was not equipped to address social issues, and Ben recognised that he should refer personal issues to his Head of Sixth-form, who would know the appropriate professional person to contact:

“I’ve had students come to me with child protection issues; you should be trained to help if they have any issues. Students might be getting messages all the time and if that impacts on their ability, you need to be able to deal with that,” (Mike, Y13 tutor)

A student in my group had personal issues so I put her in contact with M (Head of Sixth-form) so that this does not become a barrier to her,” (Ben, Y13 tutor).

Being able to support student learning relies upon establishing an empathetic relationship with the student, and also being aware of the role of the tutor. The effective teacher is able to interact with students, which led Lodge to observe that, “the experience of many schools, supported by research, suggest that 2 factors are especially associated with supporting students’ learning: the relationship between the tutor and the learner, and the focus on student learning,” (2000, p.35). Only Tim understood his role as a tutor to be much wider:

“Well, to be there as a coach/mentor for the tutor group on what is essentially a non-academic front. Support them with their studies, but as a coach rather than someone who is their teacher, with any problems they might have, whether socially or emotionally, to help to make sure that they are happy outside school. .... You can help them make sure that they are happy with their life as a whole because this will impact on everything they do.... If we’re just going to focus on education it’s not enough ... you need someone there, and that’s the role of the form tutor really, or it should be..... See them as a person... for me they’re all people and they need nurturing and care” (Tim, Y12 tutor).

Tim confused the role of the tutor with that of the coach, who aims to create knowledge and improve competence (Mullen 2012), and that of the mentor who introduces the student to helping behaviours (Miller, 2002). Adel and Amara expected their tutors to support her learning, while Kim and her friends were prepared to take the initiative to interact with their tutor in order to obtain that support:
“For me, last year we never spoke to my tutor, We never had discussions with him as a class ... now our form tutor’s so different, we do so many things, and our form tutor’s writing our references for university so it’s important that they get to see you personally, otherwise it’s just going to be limited on what they can say ... if your form tutor is not talking to you. They should be able to give you the guidance needed. So I think it’s really important that they’re dedicated to your form class” (Adel, BTEC student).

“We don’t really talk to them (form tutors) because we’ve only had one session about do you have any problems in school but we’ve played games and quizzes and stuff .... It’s different to my form tutor in secondary school because we have had a different form tutor for two years. Here we don’t have someone who knows us, and only sees us once in the morning and that’s about it. When I find out that they’re writing references, I get annoyed because they don’t know me” (Amara, A-level student).

“We try to talk to our teachers about deadlines, how we enjoy our subject because it lets them know that we are progressing” (Kim, BTEC, student)

Sixth-form students were dependent upon tutors to support their learning. Both tutors and students would benefit from an induction session which introduced the role of the tutor; otherwise students would depend upon tutor agency.

5.1.2. Tutor agency

Although all the sixth-form tutors were prepared to support their students, Biesta and Tedder observed that teacher agency depended upon, “the interplay of individual efforts, available resources and contextual or structural factors,” (2007, p.137). The daily twenty-minute registration period was criticised by tutors as being insufficient to enable them period to interact with their students, providing students were able to attend because they were not timetabled to be at another school in the sixth-form consortium during the registration period. Steve, Karen and Elaine viewed the tutor period as an uncertain point of contact with their students:
“I don’t have much of a relationship with my tutor group. This is due to a daily 20 minute registration programme which has not proved stimulating for students or me as a tutor. Students tend to avoid the programme by being late for, or not coming into registration” (Steve, Y13 tutor).

“They may be in form time for only once or twice a week and there is an attendance issue with some students, so not seeing them for some time, but being a first time tutor, doesn’t allow me to build a rapport with them” (Karen, Y12 tutor).

“I feel like I’ve actually got to know them and write references out for them, but then there are others who are quite withdrawn, who don’t really want to communicate with me, because of the way the school is set up” (Elaine, Y12 tutor).

Since the institutional organisation of the sixth-form did not lend itself to a reliable tutor programme, the impact of the tutor would seem to depend upon tutor agency. The definition of teacher agency by Frost, was that it, “involves having a sense of self-encompassing particular values and a cultural identity, and being able to pursue self-determined goals through self-conscious strategic action” (2006, pp.20). The approach of each tutor was dependent upon his/her values and cultural identity rather than a collective purpose of the sixth-form community of practice. Gulzan expressed disappointment that her tutor did not get to know her:

“My tutor is really nice, but it’s the case where it’s the last six or seven months now so we are really into our work. The tutor is lovely but she doesn’t really know us, and we don’t have a conversation. It’s like, ‘hello, how are you,’ and she marks us in the register whereas the boys have been at the school for a long time, but we don’t know the teachers like that. In our conversation with the teachers, we just sit there” (Gulzan, A-level student).

For students, the relationship with their tutor was important within the boundaries of the sixth-form community of practice, because they relied upon their tutor to support their progress towards their post sixth form destination and provide references.

5.1.3. The relationship between tutor and student
Tutor engagement in conversation with students, and the nature of that conversation, seemed to depend upon the experience and personality of the tutor:

“We do a news bit at the beginning and if there is not a planned activity I tend to go around them and see how they are getting on, I’ve had them for two years now, I think I know them quite well individually. I’ve talked to one of my students about his haircut. Are you going to keep that haircut when you go to work? We have that kind of conversation” (Elaine, Y12 tutor).

“I tend to go round individually and speak to them and see how they’re getting on. I’ve had them for two years now so I’ve got to know them quite well. Teacher to student is a strange one because you probably see more of them than their parents do” (Greta, Y12 tutor).

“I don’t encourage personal conversations unless they are to do with school, but that’s my rule of thumb and they never cross that line. I’ve had conversations in terms of sleeping patterns or diet which could impact on their studies, but in terms of what they plan to do at the weekend, no. They will ask me questions from time to time, like why did I apply to university and why did I become a teacher; they like to hear stories of my experience in terms of forming their own ideas” (Pam, Y12 tutor).

The relationship between tutor and student stems from pedagogic practice. Although school expects teachers to transmit curriculum content, especially for examinations, Batro et.al. concluded that, “the dialogue between teacher and student is the core of pedagogy,” (2013, p177). My professional experience convinced me that student learning is enhanced by recognising the individual approach to learning of each student, which means getting to know each student within the school context (Dewey, 1938). As a Head of Year, I found the most intractable problems between teacher and student occurred when the teacher was unable to interact with the student, but saw his/her role as simply the transmission of knowledge. This may have been due to a cultural divide between student and teacher, but Bernstein-Yamashiro and Nan concluded, “the teacher-student relationship allowed teachers to bring to life the curricula, to be effective teachers” (2013, p.55). Teachers will have different personality traits, but unless they are able to establish a positive teacher-student relationship, student learning is adversely affected.
The sixth-form community of practice provides a common identity for tutor and student through, “signs of recognition and, through the mutual recognition and the recognition of group membership” (Bourdieu, 2002 p.287). Although the sixth-form tutor cannot change external influences on the students, the tutor may be able to ameliorate their effect on student learning. However, the employment value of student learning is dependent upon both academic qualifications and personal attributes of employability. The second theme considered the extent to which tutors were convinced of student readiness to enter a full-time workplace for the first time.

5.2. Theme 2: Tutor perceptions of student readiness to enter the workplace

Student readiness to enter the workplace would seem to depend upon (Lüftenegger et.al. 2012), the preparedness of the student to act as an agent of change when entering a full-time workplace for the first time. There can be little doubt that academic qualification need to be accompanied by personal attributes of employability (see table 1.2.) Although statutory careers guidance (2014b) implied that university entry would enhance student employment prospects, sixth-form tutors were not convinced that student employability relied upon academic qualifications.

5.2.1. The limitation of academic qualifications

Carol argued that university entry would benefit student personal attributes of employability because of its emphasis on independent learning:

“When they go to university, nobody is going to help them, no-one is going to care if they go to a lecture or not, or chase them like we do here. Nobody’s going to tell them how to pass, they lack a certain amount of independence, and I think it contributes to the workplace as well, they’re used to help but they won’t get that when they go to work” (Carol, Y13 tutor).

An employer will expect the student recruit to learn independently how to contribute to the organisation of work. The student recruit cannot rely upon an induction programme
(Arachchige, 2014) to join the workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5.). Although Harvey observed that employability, “implies that employers have an idea of the attributes that are necessary for the effective functioning of their organisation now and in the future and that they have mechanisms for establishing that graduates exhibit appropriate attributes,” he also concluded that, “these related assumptions do not appear to be sound,” (2001 p.99). An interview process or an induction programme seems unable to enable student recruits to demonstrate appropriate personal attributes of employability in the workplace.

It is the student’s capacity to adapt to the workplace (Pinquart, 2003) which is likely to determine his/her occupational competency in using academic qualifications to contribute to the organisation of work. Mike suggested that university entry provided students with the opportunity to continue being students in the same way that entering the sixth-form prolonged their lower school experience of being a student:

“When they go to the sixth-form they think they’re making a life changing choice, but they are doing the same thing as when they didn’t have a choice about it. A lot want to go to university because it extends that time longer” (Mike, Y13 tutor).

Most tutors perceived a clear difference between the practices of the sixth-form and the practices of the workplace. In order to prepare students for entry to the workplace Steve suggested that students could take more responsibility for their own learning:

“The education bubble doesn’t make them aware .... Students need more responsibility for their own learning as with independent study periods. The biggest skill is the ability to communicate, have self-confidence, ability to interact in a formal environment, both verbal and written communication, dress appropriately for different types of employment. Another skill is the ability to work in teams, having confidence to take on initiative” (Steve, Y13 tutor)

Tim implied that there needed to be a significant change in pedagogic practice to prepare student for the workplace since the sixth-form is designed to avoid student failure, whereas the workplace relies upon the employee to be able to make independent decisions and learn from mistakes:
“Carrying out the instruction is a massive problem because when you’re in school, back to the qualification thing, people need to learn through failure ... when they’re in school we are teaching them because often they have to get through a qualification... they don’t know how to fail. So that when they get to the workplace, they are waiting to be told what to do, and ultimately if you can follow instructions, that’s good but you need to be able to carry out that instruction, knowing you are going to fail it” (Tim, Y12 tutor).

Ben and Mike questioned the contribution of sixth-form education to student employability because it did not develop the personal attributes which were required in the workplace:

“They are taught how to get on, but they are not taught how to thrive in a working environment, what are the things that are required of you in a working environment. In the sixth form you are surrounded by your peers and in the workplace this isn’t the case. They might be friendly but they are not your friends who you have grown up with” (Mike, Y13 tutor).

“I think a lot of it is young people’s idea of how to behave in an adult environment ....They’re having to work with people, as well as under people. You might become more familiar with your teacher, but not with your boss.... It’s how they form those professional relationships” (Ben, Y13 tutor).

Greta and Diane suggested that the supportive relationship which develops between student and teacher, in order to encourage student academic achievement, may discourage students from developing personal attributes of employability appropriate for the workplace:

“I’m quite familiar with my students because I’ve had them for 2 years now and they know that they can talk to me in a certain way, but I know that if they went into the workplace and talked that way they would be beyond the boundaries” (Greta, Y12 tutor).

“They are bit too relaxed. They find it difficult to understand why there are certain rules in the sixth form ... in their heads they’re grown up now and they can take these kind of decisions if they want to be late” (Diane, Y13 tutor).
However, Harvey (2001) questioned institutional effectiveness in developing student employability because personal attributes of employability relied on too many variables. The role of the teacher is to prepare students for academic exams and the role of the tutor is to support student learning (Lodge, 2000) within the school context. Although school can have an impact on student self-efficacy through academic qualifications (Luftenegger et.al, 2012), student personal attributes are the product of each student’s whole social experience. Greta recalled learning from experience in making the transition from being a student to becoming an employee:

“I think anyone who has worked, who has had a job, has had that moment when you realise that it is nothing like being at school. You’ve got to change the way you carry yourself and the way you speak, they don’t realise that anyway..... I think they need to work on their language. They’ve always got this complex with leadership and teachers telling them what to do. In the workplace they will be not able to answer back, they will have to do what they have to do pleasantly, and they don’t realise that if they don’t do that they will get fired. It’s not going to be as easy for them as in school, when we turn the other cheek or ignore them..... I think that the key issue with them would be communication. Getting on with their work and they don’t know how to do that, they don’t know how not to be spoon fed some of them. It’s not all of them, there are some lovely kids, not very horrible kids, but you know.... there’s always a handful in class who help you continuously, and they won’t get that. It will be a big shock for them when they go; they don’t have that support anymore” (Greta, Y12 tutor).

There is a significant cultural difference between being a sixth-form student and being an employee. Those students who are the ‘lovely kids’ are likely to be those who can interact with an unfamiliar tutor in the unfamiliar social circumstance of the sixth form learning environment. However the transition from school to workplace need not rely upon inherited cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986), since self-efficacy enables the student to change his/her functioning (Sen 1997) and adapt to the workplace community of practice (se section 2.1.5.). Self-efficacy provides a belief in one’s capabilities, “to organise and execute the courses of action required to attain designated types of performance,” (Bandura, 1986 p.391), and Luftenegger et.al. (2012) concluded that there were two central components of lifelong learning: the will to learn and the skills to learn. Making a successful transition from being a student to becoming an employee seems to depend upon escaping the education bubble.
5.2.2. Escaping the education bubble

Unless the student can make the transition from being a student to becoming an employee, the
student recruit to the workplace is likely to rely upon finding a compatible workplace which
reflects his/her student identity. Pam suggested that reliance upon inherited cultural capital
(Bourdieu 1986) was unavoidable:

“Being prepared for employment should happen on the day you are born, do you know what I
mean. If you’re prepared for employment, we instil a lifestyle which means you are able to work,
be a responsible citizen” (Pam, Y12 tutor).

To the extent that personal attributes of employability are embodied in the student (Bourdieu,
1986), the student can expect to find a workplace which is compatible with his/her inherited
cultural and social capital. In support of this proposition, Bowlby (1988) argued that personal
attributes, such as resilience, were developed from birth. Elaine suggested that the socio-
economic background of her students would act as a barrier to social mobility:

“We’re a working class school but when you enter one of the law firms down the road, I assume
that they are filled with middles class white British individuals” (Elaine, Y12 tutor).

However, a student recruit to the workplace can act as an agent of change in order to join the
workplace community of practice (Omidvar and Kislov, 2013; Lave, 1982). The ability of the
student to act as an agent of change and construct a vocational habitus (see section 2.1.4.)
depends not so much on inherited cultural capital but on a capacity for self-efficacy
(Lüftenegger et. al. 2012), and acceptance of a change of identity (Fejesa and Kopsena, 2014)
resulting from belonging to the workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5.). However,
Diane, Ben and Carol observed that their students were unprepared for entry to the workplace
because they were primarily concerned with achieving examination grades as a means to
preferred employment:
“In the short-term students are worried about gaining qualifications to gain employment .... they are frazzled when they return from summer holidays, having studied for AS level exams” (Carol, Y13 tutor).

“I think in Year 12 it all seems quite far away. When they start doing their UCAS and job applications in the last 4 weeks, it’s very much a case of let’s do this before summer and then forget about it. It’s only in this last year that they’ve really had to think about what they want to do and what skills and experiences they need to do that.... they’ve got a lot of big decisions to make in that short amount of timetable” (Ben, Y13 tutor).

“I don’t think they think it (employability) matters. They think grades matter. I think that whatever degree they get, or class of degree they get, they think that matters. Qualifications will get you through the door and then how you perform at the interview, and the way you act in the workplace allows you to keep your job. I think they think that as long as they get their A’s they will be fine. That’s it for life basically” (Diane, Y13 tutor).

Unless students are a prepared to act as agents of change when they enter the full-time workplace, they are likely to assume that their existing social experience of being a student is sufficient to become an employee and join the workplace community of practice. The third theme considers the extent to which the sixth-form tutors can develop student employability.

5.3. Theme 2: The potential of sixth form tutors to develop student employability

The role of the sixth-form tutor is to support student learning (Lodge, 2000); however student recognition that tutors are a source of knowledge (Bowlby, 1988, EY Foundation, 2016) can enable tutors to develop student employability if they adopt the role of the mentor. According to Linehan and McCarthy, “students learn in school how to relate to the community that school is, how to belong in the school community, and for a time anyway, construct their identities with respect to the school community” (2000, p.437). An employability mentor can prepare students to enter the workplace using their experience of joining the school community of practice.

5.3.1. Tutor development of student employability
Steve and Greta felt that they could rely upon knowledge stemming from their own experience to advise students on how to progress to their post-sixth form destinations:

“Basically, professional guidance within their subject, on how their subject can help them to progress to university, or meaningful apprenticeship or employment” (Steve, Y13 tutor).

“I think in terms of application procedures, interviews – I’ve had quite a lot of interviews, C.V.s, not so much in terms of specific jobs they are going for, but a general outline,” (Greta, Y12 tutor).

Tutors also expected to be able to transmit their experience of employment to develop student employability. Carol, Ben and Mike had learned about the personal attributes required for employment from experience of belonging to other workplaces:

“I worked in an office for 5 years after leaving school. When I started teaching I’ve always been a sixth-form tutor, so in terms of experience, I’ve got an understanding of real life jobs” (Carol Y13 tutor).

“Work experience, working for different departments in a company .... I understand the requirements of working in a private organisation, understanding organisational structures, the importance of being professional, understanding of private sector ethos I have done other levels of work as a student – hotels, bars, restaurants, cleaning cars” (Ben Year 13 tutor).

“Having worked in other environments myself from the age of 15 has allowed me to build up that social capital which is necessary for the workplace. As a teacher you need to have a professional manner and so you quickly realise that’s the way you should be behaving, therefore I think that qualifies me as someone who is able to impart advice” (Mike, Y13 tutor).

Tim and John had accumulated cultural and social capital through travel, meeting unfamiliar others in unfamiliar social situations, and they assumed that they could transmit their experience to their students:
“I’ve done a lot of travelling.... I understand how to cope with change, to cope with different cultures, being aware of people, things like that.... Being able to follow instructions is huge. Being able to listen to follow instructions is huge” (Tim, Y12 tutor).

“Throughout the years dealing with different cultures and beliefs and strong interpersonal skills and I also have an interest in other cultures” (John, Y13 tutor).

However, Bourdieu argued that cultural and accumulated social capital could not be transmitted and that such capital is inherited and embodied in the concept of ‘habitus’, “the individual trace of an entire collective history,” (1990, p.91) of family, socio-economic background, and social activities. Wanting to escape class generalisation, Bourdieu developed his sociological analysis of the interaction between people and their environment (Reay, 2004), but in doing so he inferred that individuals were not the prisoners of their social history. This inference suggested students could avoid social positioning in their choice of a workplace; as Reay argued, “anchoring habitus to cultural capital provides a means to understand how individuals are differently positioned in their new environment,” (2004, p.276). The concept of ‘habitus’ allows the student to change his/her inherited habitual behaviour through the application of self to the social situation of the workplace.

According to Bruner, “meaning making involves situating encounters with the world in their appropriate cultural contexts in order to know, ‘what they are about’ .... It is this cultural situatedness of meanings that assures their negotiability, and ultimately their communicability” (2004, p.170). The student recruit to the workplace can use his/her personal attributes to negotiate entry to the workplace community of practice and communicate with work colleagues to demonstrate occupational competency. Tim and Carol were aware that their advice to students could not replace experience of the workplace:

“I can advise anyone on what to do or how to behave, but that’s easy, classroom versus real world .... Any situation can be replicated in the lab as such, but you don’t know what is going to happen until you’re put in a real life situation. So, yes I could advise them, but I don’t think that advice is going to be very effective for the majority of people because they are not experiencing it, but getting told about it” (Tim, Y12 tutor).
“I think I’m able to tell them what it’s like and what is expected of them, I don’t think I’m equipped to change their behaviour” (Carol, Y13 tutor).

Each student’s construct of social reality (see section 2.1.1) would inform the extent to which he/she was able to negotiate entry to the workplace community of practice, a construct develop by a unique social experience.

5.3.2. Other influences on student employability

Students would be unlikely to consider the advice of their tutors in isolation from their social construct of reality which was a product of their social experience. Tim appreciated that school experience could not be divorced from experience outside school:

“Life is no longer separate, and because of technology, life intertwines. You go home and work on your laptop at home; students are the same. They might be getting messages all the time and if they impact on their ability to be in school, you need to deal with that. We did this in my old school, mindfulness... Essentially it’s about trying to focus on this moment in time rather than the future and tying to make sure you are productive in the moment... If you haven’t got a life work balance in education or as someone working, then you’re not going to be productive” (Tim, Y12 tutor).

Tim also recognised that the students were most likely to be successful employees if they had sufficient cultural and capital to join the workplace community of practice:

“Maybe they need a bit of confidence building in the workplace. Gradually you’ll get a frustration from maybe their employer, from the student whose gone in, and that will escalate....to get them to cope with something they are not used to ... you probably learn quicker in the workplace, which is why the students who are often more successful when they go into the workplace are students who are more grown up and can speak to you in an adult conversation” (Tim, Y12 tutor).

However Tim’s solution to easing the transition from school to workplace was to achieve a state of mind which enables the student to identify with being an employee:
We did this in my old school, mindfulness... Essentially it’s about trying to focus on this moment in time rather than the future and trying to make sure you are productive in the moment... If you haven’t got a life work balance in education or as someone working, then you’re not going to be productive” (Tim, Y12 tutor).

The concept of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994) assumes that the student can ignore the influence of his/her socio-economic background make a cognitive adaptation to being a member of the workplace community of practice. Although the concept may help a student to learn course content in order to pass an academic exam, to be productive in the moment, being an employee is a social experience rather than a cognitive exercise since it involves the application of personal attributes to interact with unfamiliar work colleagues.

Employers have been able to identify appropriate personal attributes of employability (CBI, 2013) but they have been unable to suggest how those attributes can be acquired. The 2014 Teach First Report (an employer funded organisation) assumed that personal attributes of employability could be transmitted, citing as good practice a case study school where, “coaching conversations scaffold the development of self-control, self-awareness and social skills by helping pupils analyse their response to situations and scenarios from others perspectives” (p. 13). However, role play cannot reproduce the real social situation of the workplace, and the reactions of the student recruit may be different to those practiced in an artificial context.

Although intervention in school to develop student employability cannot transmit appropriate personal attributes of employability, this does not seem to have been appreciated by central government. Statutory careers guidance promotes information, advice and guidance, (Dfe 2014b), while the 2014 Report of the Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills advised that teachers were an important source of social capital, particularly for pupils from low income families who may have less professional contacts. Although employers recognised the impact of socio-economic background (The TeachFirst Report, 2014; Impetus Report, 2014) on student employability, employers connected to the Futures programme expected school to prepare students for work readiness (see section 3.2.2). In satisfying statutory careers guidance, the Futures programme has not developed student employability.
Sixth-form tutors were aware that factors other than academic qualification were influential in student employability, but suggested that student socio-economic background was not the most significant factor. Ben suggested that social positioning was declining, Greta thought that background was becoming less important, and John suggested that a disadvantaged background could have a positive impact:

“White working class encourage their sons to go into trades – electrician – and they can say, ‘look at my dad, he earns more than you and he is a builder or a carpenter.’ So overcoming that barrier to a student who has potential (is a problem). More girls are wanting to go into higher levels of management, less wanting to go into nursing or health or beauty than when I started out in teaching, 7 years ago, which is a testament to girls ... parents who have a higher level of education are more aware of the value of different types of A-level qualification” (Ben, Y13 tutor).

“Expectations of what you can achieve or what jobs are available is limited by background. I think it’s becoming less of an issue now... Here we encourage students into education regardless of background” (Greta, Y12 tutor).

“I think if people have come from a working class background and they have seen their parents struggle, they are more interested in achieving. I have had this conversation with one of my tutor group who want to do really well because of how he was bought up, so I think it does play a role for some of them, especially if they have seen their parents struggle or they haven’t been able to get things they wanted as they were growing up. It can push them, it just depends upon personal circumstances doesn’t it” (John, Y13 tutor).

Parental influence was considered to be a significant factor in the choice of post sixth-form destination but there was no poverty of aspiration amongst:

“There is a link between ethnicity and expectations of parents. Parents tend to drive students in some directions and exclude others. They value Maths because it is the path into a well paid job. Subject grades are seen as a means of advancement.... the enthusiasm of parents has a big effect on attainment in school. It is important that students have exposure to different experiences. Home has a big influence on attainment” (Steve, Y13 tutor).
“In certain cultures I think that there is an emphasis with regards to, just a general encouragement to be doctors and dentists and the highest academic achievement they could possibly go for” (John, Y13 tutor).

The responses of the tutors suggested that they were aware that student employability was more complex than reliance upon academic qualifications; however their suggestions as to how students could be prepared for the workplace were problematic.

5.3.3. The preparation of students for entry to the workplace

Although students have experience of joining the school community of practice (Eraut, 2004), entry to a full-time workplace for the first-time requires all student recruits to act as agents of change. However, the capacity to change functioning is neither equal nor innate (Sen, 1997). Unless students are prepared to become employees, they can expect to rely upon a random compatibility with their chosen workplace. As an experienced sixth-form tutor Pam suggested that the search for a compatible workplace had been the social reality for some time:

“Students don’t expect this to happen, but this is the way things are going. It’s just the way society has evolved really, and they will certainly be part of that. I didn’t start teaching till I was 28” (Pam, Y12 tutor).

The Wolf Report (2011) had observed that students tend to change jobs when they are in their 20s, which Ben suggested was the result of students looking for a job which reflected their expectations of employment (see section 4.2.):

I’ve got friends who are thirty and have had three or four jobs already after leaving university; and a lot of them are: I’m not sure that this is what I want to do in five years time. You might change in two years, things don’t stay the same. You might decide I’m more interested in this than I was in that if you do your degree in something you are not interested in, you might find something more interesting. They’ve all got these plans of what they want to do but to be honest there’s a lot of movement” (Ben, Y13 tutor).
The search for a compatible workplace may result in students working for exam qualifications for a preferred career which does not materialise, leaving their academic qualifications to be only loosely related to their eventual workplace. This scenario seemed likely to undermine student sense of achievement and self-esteem. Tim argued that the lack of preparation for students entering the workplace for the first time can cause students to become anxious about future employment:

“You can see that a lot of students who struggle are usually stressing about the fact that they’re worried about the future; there are also those who struggle with work. Some say that it’s because they are lazy; I don’t think it’s that. It’s because deep down they don’t know how to access the work, and that comes down to providing them with the skills to access the work on their own.... So when they go to the workplace they are waiting to be told what to do,” (Tim Y12 tutor).

In order to remove anxiety, Tim suggested that school could take responsibility for bridging the gap between sixth-form and workplace:

*The problem for me is that when they go to employment they don’t know how to cope, they know how to jump through a hoop; they don’t know how to learn. For me, and I’ve got experience of this, we should be focussing the curriculum on a more project based approach. In terms of skills, they haven’t been instructed how to prepare for the job.... it should be embedded from Key Stage 3, the transition is quite difficult*” (Tim, Y12 tutor).

However, it is unlikely that the DfE would abandon its emphasis upon sixth-form academic achievement (Education Funding Agency, 2017) and subsequent progression to university, despite employers considering school to be too academic (City and Guilds, 2013). Ben suggested that sixth-form vocational education could be organised on a national scale and train teachers to develop student employability:

“There should be training provided by sixth form centres across the country, with a link with HR managers of private limited companies, to come into schools to train teachers as to what they are looking for in an organisation, whether apprenticeships or other training schemes, and then be able to impart knowledge to sixth forms” (Ben, Y13 tutor).
Reliance upon external support for careers education would seem to be misplaced. A national organisation for vocational education is unlikely to be introduced since the DfE would have to take back responsibility for careers education (2011b), and reverse the trend of decentralising the public service sector (Clarke, 2008). However, the sixth-form can extend its pedagogic practice to develop student employability through the provision of one-to-one mentors (see section 2.3.2.), choosing those sixth-form teaching staff who are comfortable interacting with their students. It is likely that the tutor/teacher will need to adopt a different practice as a mentor (Papadimos, 2013).

For effective mentoring, Sandner advises that, “it is essential that the mentee perceives the mentor to be a competent, reliable adviser and that the relationship between mentee and mentor is personal and trusting” (2015, p.227). The availability of potential mentors depends upon the number of tutors/teachers who can empathise with their students, while being seen as the source of learning about employability. Nevertheless, as a social rather than a cognitive process, “learning takes place through our participation in multiple social practices, practices that are formed through pursuing any kind of enterprise over time” (Farnsworth et.al. 2016, p.140). The intervention of an employability mentor would be one of many social interventions, but it can be a defining moment in the continuum of lifelong learning.

5.4. Summary

This chapter has presented and discussed findings from interview data which addressed the study’s second research question: What role do sixth-form staffs perceive they have in helping students to develop their employability? The data from interviews with sixth-form tutors (n=11) and students (n=18) were coded and the codes were then refined and collated into three themes, which emerged from the coding process.

The first theme considered tutor perceptions of being a sixth-form tutor. Although tutor perceptions were individualised, a degree of consensus emerged because of the common context of the sixth-form community of practice. All of the tutors saw their role as guiding their students through the sixth-form, which Lodge (2000) argued was the purpose of the tutor. Some tutors were more confident than others, but the students expected their tutors to get to know
them. However, being an effective tutor depended upon tutor agency, since there was an insufficient allocation of time for tutorial sessions, and the extent of student support depended upon the experience and personality of the tutor (Biesta and Tedder, 2007). There was a significant gap in social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) between tutor and student, but the role of the tutor was an extension of pedagogic practice which relied upon interaction between student and teacher (Priestly, 2015; Batro, 2013), there was also a common sense of purpose, since both belonged to the sixth-form community of practice.

The second theme considered tutor perceptions of student readiness to enter the workplace. None of the tutors thought that their students were ready to enter the workplace since the workplace did not resemble school. The tutors recognised that academic qualifications were not considered sufficient to enable students to become employees, and the supportive environment of the sixth-form was not considered a useful preparation for the independent learning environment of the workplace. Nevertheless, tutors did not feel equipped to develop student personal attributes of employability (CBI, 2016; Robles, 2012) employability beyond the learning environment of the sixth-form and were unable to suggest an effective means of intervention.

The third theme investigated the potential of sixth-form tutors to develop student employability. Although the transmission of cultural and social capital is not feasible in enabling students to join the social situation of the workplace, students have already experienced belonging to a community of practice and experienced situated learning (Linehan and McCarthy, 2000; Lave, 1991). Tutors can develop student employability through acting as mentors, rather than teachers or tutors (Papadimos, 2013) in order to guide student to become employee, Being a mentor requires an empathetic relationship with the student, (Sandner, 2015), rather an effective transmission of subject content, and there may be teachers who are more suitable than tutors to be mentors. The employability mentor will be expected to be familiar with the employability of student recruits, but mentors can come from existing members of staff and be included in existing sixth-form practice. Nevertheless, the transformation from student to employee is likely to depend upon the student’s self-efficacy (Luftenegger, 2012). The next chapter investigated the impact of the Futures programme on sixth-form student employability and the contribution of the Futures work experience programme to the development of student employability.
Chapter 6. Findings and discussion for RQ3: How do students and staff experience the Futures programme and what impact do they perceive it has on student capacity for employability?

Introduction

This chapter analyses and discusses the data from interviews with sixth-form students (n=18) and staff (n=12), and from the documents which outline the Futures programme policy and practice (Appendices C-H). The chapter addresses the third research question: How do students
and staff experience the Futures programme and what impact do they perceive it has on student employability? The transcribed data and documentary evidence were re-read to enable familiarity before being coded (figure 6.1). Two themes emerged from the coding process (table 6.2.), and these themes were then reviewed so that they focussed on the research question. A selection of extracts from the transcribed data is used to illustrate the findings from each theme, accompanied by a discussion of those findings.

**Figure 6.1. Initial coding of data for RQ3**

| Statutory obligation – familiarity of staff with Futures programme – student post sixth form destinations – student career decision taking – influence of Futures programme on student destinations – influence of Y12 annual workshops student employability - other influences on student destinations – in guidance on appropriate destinations – establishing a partnership with local employers - providing work experience placements – student perceptions of work experience – sixth form tutor’s perceptions of the value of work experience – work experience expectations of employers. |

The chapter is organised into 3 sections, one for each theme, with sub-sections for each specific, and the third section for a summary of the findings and discussion. The first theme considered the influence of the Futures programme on student choice of a post sixth form destination, and the potential for extension of the programme (section 6.1.). The second theme examined the impact of Futures work experience placements on student employability, the benefit work experience, and the benefit of the subsequent partnership between the programme and employers (section 6.2.). The third section provided a summary of the findings and discussion of those findings (section 6.3.).

**Table 6.1. Emerging themes for RQ3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Theme 1: Statutory careers guidance and the Futures programme</strong></th>
<th><strong>Theme 2: The contribution of work experience to student employability.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The influence of the Futures programme on student choice of post sixth form destination.</td>
<td>1. The impact of Futures work experience on student employability.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.1. Theme 1: Statutory guidance and the Futures programme

The Futures programme was introduced in 2012 in response to the transfer of responsibility for careers education from local authorities to schools in the previous year (2011b). Statutory careers guidance followed in 2013 (DfE 2013) and it was revised in 2014 (DfE 2014b). The Futures programme was designed to satisfy revised statutory careers guidance (Appendix C), which was included in the school assessment by Ofsted.

6.1.1. The influence of the Futures programme on student choice of post sixth-form destination

The priority of statutory careers guidance (2014b) was to ensure that students chose a post sixth-form destination which reflected their academic qualifications, and that students did not become NEETS (neither in education, employment or training). This also became the primary aim of the Futures programme:

‘The purpose of the Futures programme is to ensure the successful progression of ... students into high quality further education training and employment .... Identifying and recording the likely pathways for all students in Year 11, Year 12 and Year 13 after they finish their time at The Old School. This information is used to monitor the success of the Futures and UCAS programme and ensure that action is taken where need be (Appendix D)

In order to enable students to choose a post sixth-form destination, the Futures programme provided a wealth of careers information (Appendices D, and E), a monthly bulletin (Appendix G), and an annual week-long workshop (Appendix H). Both Kim and Agatha welcomed the information provided by the Futures programme:

“We’d gone for employability talks and they’d talked to us about how they got there and we could develop our skills to get there” (Kim, BTEC student).
“Yeah, I think that Futures told me how a degree would give me more options because they are not looking for specialists unless you want to be a lawyer” (Agatha, A-level student).

However, Galliott and Graham (2014) argued that, “in order to be able to make a judgement regarding high school students’ career choice capability, one should move beyond the potential number of career options available for students,” (p.276). A career choice which attracts student interest is more likely to facilitate agitative action and motivate the student to become a self-regulated learner in the workplace (Luftenegger, 2012).

Although the Futures programme left students to make their own career choice, O’Conner advised that individual choice involves, “an accompanying opening up of choices, or possibilities, to people in terms of future life directions” (2014, p.373). The Futures programme did not seek to identify student life direction, and provided a wealth of careers information rather than target careers appropriate for each student. This approach created uncertainty for some students. Hannah wanted the programme to identify her interests, Dacey was uncertain about the relevance of the advice she had received, and Sahin would have preferred information related to his choice of career:

“Well personally I don’t know how it is for people in the school, but for me just getting to know what you would like, it’s fine, but it’s all well and good shoving a bunch of opportunities at you, but if they’re not kind of what you like, or you’re not going to take any interest, I feel like it’s actually knowing what the students want,” (Hannah, BETEC student).

“There were lots of workshops and businesses coming in saying we offer apprenticeships and graduate sponsorship. Then you’d have people from relatively high positions coming in to give a talk, you been advised in a way” (Dacey, BTEC student).

“I think the one thing they could do is bring more people in that are more business focussed so they kind of talk about your futures rather than the subject ... I went into a law talk and was really interested in what this guy was saying, but I’m more passionate to go into business” (Sahin, A-level student).
Mohammed would have benefitted from careers advice before choosing his sixth-form course of study:

“For all my life, I’ve really not known what to do and I’ve always thought about it but there’s never anything which has really attracted me. I’m one of those people who want to be an architect, and want to be a business man, I’m always changing. When I chose what I wanted to do in the sixth-form, I weren’t so sure. So originally I wanted to do A-levels for my first year, because I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do, but it turned out that I didn’t enjoy them., they didn’t interest me to work hard at them, so I didn’t do very well at A-levels so I did BTEC instead, and Business BTEC had the best pathway to my mind, but I didn’t like business BTEC either. So to my mind, it hasn’t changed my perception of what I wanted to do, so it just made me more confused” (Mohammed, BTEC student).

Katie had identified a career, but found the information provided was not tailored to her academic qualifications:

“I wanted to do medicine, but the only thing that came up (in Futures bulletin), you had to have 6 A*s so you could be eligible for it, and I had 4 A*s not 6 (GCSEs)” (Katie, A-level student).

Katie may have been discouraged from pursuing a career in medicine because she did not have enough grade A*s at GCSE level for an external summer course, even though her A-level grades may be sufficient for entry to a medical school and her interest in medicine would provide a motive for agentive action. Her pursuit of a medical career needed to be encouraged since a career narrative (Savickas, 2001) can encourage the student recruit to apply personal attributes to joining the workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5.) through self-efficacy (Pinquart et.al., 2003). Targeted support for a career choice career is beneficial to the student; Galliot and Graham argued that, “to understand student readiness to make an agentive career choice, it is vital to analyse a wide range of their functionings from how well informed they are to how developed their self-efficacy is,” (p.276). The authors acknowledged the contribution of Sen (1990), who argued that people possess different abilities to convert resources into achievements, which implies that academic qualifications do not provide equality of opportunity for students entering the workplace.
Students may make career choices irrespective of their personal attributes of employability however, following statutory careers guidance (Dfe 2014b); only the students who are unable to identify a post-sixth form destination have been allocated a mentor.

‘The 7 students who have not secured are receiving support from the school with 4 out of the 7 students attending weekly employability support sessions with (the programme co-ordinator)’ (Appendix E).

Since the careers programme did not provide individual student careers counselling, students tended to be influenced in their choice by external factors. Alex, Sahin and Katie were influenced by their families:

“My sister really loves art but you know it’s really difficult subject to get on with so they advised architecture or catering, good pay with something that you enjoy” (Sahin A-level)

“So my brother ended up going down the wrong route, but he is where he is and that made my parents push me more, so I’ve now invested more in education. You see he didn’t know what to do. Internationally degrees are so important” (Alex, BTEC student).

“My mum wants me to go to uni. Get an education. I chose Science and she’s happy with me doing Science ... my brother went into Maths and she wanted me to do something different and she always like the idea of me being a doctor and stuff” (Katie, A-level).

From research into how 86 parents had used their resources to promote the education of their children, Devine concluded that, “there was no evidence of a poverty of aspiration or any lack of cultural capital among the lower-middle-class and working-class families,” (2004, p.9), which reflected the demographic of The Old School sixth-form intake.

Parental socio-economic background may have reflected their immigrant status, and the parents of the sixth-form intake may have been more ambitious for their children than that background suggested. Sean and Peter were influenced by the meaning they derived from their own social experience:
“I used to hang around with people much older than my age and what they are going through now, and how they ended up in the results they were getting and that really showed me that I didn’t want to be like that and I wanted to excel that instead of hanging around with those kind of people and I really tried to buckle down and get as good a grade as I could” (Sean, A-level student).

“I was playing with a team, I think QPR until the age of 16, but like 2 weeks after my 16th birthday I broke my hip. I had to get released due to how long the hip would take and it just completely changed. I thought one day I was going to be a footballer and my other passion than football was Maths and I like to see money on balance sheets, and forecasts and I looked into it through work experience, and I signed up for an interview” (Peter, BTEC student).

The choice of career was individualised and not dependent upon students’ perceptions of their employability. Alex applied self-knowledge and previous experience to decide on his choice of career:

“Well actually you learn for yourself. You learn what kind of character you are, what type of path you want to take. I only took this course because I’m interested in business. I have my own business, sell cars online and I also sell from other online sites and ebay. I’ve fell in love with this subject because I know that during this time, can become successful through it. You learn a lot about yourself through these years” (Alex, BTEC student).

Neither statutory guidance nor the Futures programme addressed the issue of self-efficacy, the capacity of the student to apply personal attributes to the workplace community of practice (Pinquart et.al., 2003). However, Colley et.al. argued that the construction of a vocational habitus (see section 2.1.4) for the workplace was likely to result in a ‘choosable identity’, one that falls within student ‘horizons for action’ (Colley et.al. 2007). The authors argued that it was a combination of, “social and family backgrounds, individual preferences and life experiences that predispose them to orientate to the vocational habitus and become ‘right for the job’,” (p.448). The capacity for self-efficacy and a change of functioning (Sen, 1997) is therefore limited by each student’s previous and present social experience.
The Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers report (HMG, 2011) documented the extent to which attainment and life chances were strongly influenced by gender, disability, race and social class. However, the response of successive UK governments has been to raise the academic performance of state schools (Hoskins and Baker, 2014), which can enhance self-efficacy to the extent that it raises student the self-esteem, but does not address the issue of student employability. Previously, Bates (1991 and 1994) had argued that vocational education can mediate between classed-gendered backgrounds and the demands of the workplace, suggesting that an expanded Futures programme can develop student employability.

6.1.2. The intended expansion of the Futures programme

Since the sixth-form curriculum is predicated on academic achievement, tutors are likely to view student entry to H.E. as a measure of student achievement and teachers are likely to see it as a vindication of their pedagogic approach. Both Mike and Ben were impressed by the contribution of the Futures programme to student entry to university:

“I’m very impressed by Futures and the work that is done … I think Futures has come on a lot in the last year or so. It has become involved in the process of preparing students for university” (Mike, Y13 tutor).

“From my experience of working in a top independent school and varying ability comprehensive schools and mixed schools, it’s the best I’ve seen. I’ve never been in a school which does more for their A-level students. I haven’t had any direct involvement with Futures to be honest with you apart from going through the bulletin and discussing it with students, things that they may go to or things that they may have been interested in; but yea, they provide the students with a lot of opportunities. I have never had it when I was young. I do say to that they don’t realise how lucky they are” (Ben, Y13 tutor).

Karen assumed that the programme developed student employability, and Elaine assumed that it acted to promote social mobility:
“It is astonishing. It’s a fantastic programme ... they address everything they (students) need to move onto the next stage and it is evident in the statistics they have generated.... and it’s not stagnant, with a real emphasis on evaluating whether it has been impactful,“ (Elaine Y12 tutor).

“What Futures gives them is very important in terms of social mobility, enabling students from working class families, who may be working in lower paid jobs with a minimum wage ... to realise that their grades and their experience will get them to what they want to do with hard work. It opens doors which they wouldn’t have seen before. I think it is really empowering,” (Karen Y12 tutor).

However, detachment from the Futures programme left Gerta, Diane and Steve unsure about its purpose:

“I think it’s great what they do.... I know they do skills workshops and apprenticeships and I know they practice interviews ....I don’t know what they are setting out to achieve” (Gerta, Y12 tutor).

“Things like when they get taken off timetable to do particular things .... The ones that know exactly what they are doing, there doesn’t seem much point, for others it’s very useful. I don’t have much feedback on students who have struggled with employment” (Diane, Y13 tutor).

“I am not familiar with what they do, except prepare CVs and prepare for interviews, CV prep .... I don’t deal with that side of the sixth form” (Steve, Y13 tutor).

The expansion of the programme was intended to support post sixth-form progression, in line with statutory guidance, by supporting BTEC students as well as A-level students in their applications for a post-sixth form destination:

“There is a perception among students that they can only be successful if they’ve gone to university.... A lot of students go into H.E. because the process is set out for them we run UCAS (University and college application service) workshops, they get a UCAS mentor, they get a place but there’s no clear pathway into apprenticeships or into the workplace, and this is what we are trying to create through the Futures programme” (Janice, Futures co-ordinator).
The extension of the programme involved persuading sixth-form teachers and students that there was a viable alternative to university entry, and this would introduce tutors to the concept of employability:

“We need to educate teachers and students that actually there are professions that you can go into and study at the same time or be successful in which you don’t need to study for a degree, like accountancy for example.... Employers that I have been dealing with, say, the tech business around here, they are saying they don’t want someone with a degree, they want somebody who’s really keen to learn and employment; we can teach them specifically what we need for our businesses, which is what they are doing with graduates anyway” (Janice, Futures co-ordinator).

Employers were beginning to question the value of an academic degree and there was an opportunity for direct entry to employment from the sixth-form into employment without penalising students for not having a traditional degree (see p.155). Higher Apprenticeships provide situated learning (Lave, 1991) in addition to technical skills and part-time study. In 2012, research for the PricewaterhouseCooper found that, “the emphasis is now shifting, with employers looking to offer a wider range of different entry routes which enable them to attract and recruit from a broader, more diverse talent pool,” (Hamnet and Baker 2012, p.323). However Higher Apprenticeships have proved slow to develop. Although there were 499,900 apprenticeship starts in England in 2014/15, there were only 19,800 Higher (level 4 and above) Apprenticeships (Saraswat, 2016).

A considerable obstacle to the growth of Higher Apprenticeships was the perception of students, parents and teachers that they are of lower status than the academic route to employment, resulting in lower pay and promotion prospects (p.414). It remains to be seen whether or not the introduction of apprenticeship degrees will change perceptions of Higher Apprenticeships. However, the engagement of, teachers/tutors in the development of student employability is a means of changing student and parent perceptions. Pam suggested that that her experience could have been utilised by the Futures programme:

“I feel like the Futures are separate from the tutors. I was a tutor in the sixth form for a lot of years before Futures was established and I think they appear and you have to deal with it. All my experience was put aside and they created a unit which was quite cut off from the tutor.
There may be reasons for that in that it works better. I don’t know in terms of UCAS” (Pam, Y12 tutor).

Diane and Mike were aware of a need to develop student personal attributes of employability:

“I know they’re doing a big push on extra-curricular at the moment. I know they had an opportunity to talk about transferable skills and communicate and all those skills, which is what I think they are aiming towards the moment; but what I find with UCAS references is that it is very easy to big up their academic credentials, but if they’ve not got any further skills or examples to go with it then there is not an awful lot to write about. In terms of leadership positions, I think that’s the way they want to go, with the connections outside school” (Diane, Y13 tutor).

“They are taught how to get exams, but they are not taught how to thrive in a working environment, what things are required of you in a professional environment” (Mike, Year 13 tutor).

To compensate for the sixth-form emphasis on academic achievement, the Futures co-ordinator hoped to provide students with experience of the workplace through a programme of meaningful and relevant work experience placements. The second theme investigates the employability benefits gained by students from placements.

6.2. Theme 2: The contribution of sixth-form work experience to student employability

Although work experience was not assessed by Ofsted under statutory careers advice (DfE, 2014b), it was included under statutory advice (2015b), which recommended, “high quality work experience that properly reflects individuals’ studies and strengths, and supports the academic curriculum” (p. 5). The funding of work experience depended upon placements being relevant to the student’s course of study and supporting the academic curriculum, however work experience was also intended to bridge the gap between education and the workplace (DfE 2015c). The relevance of work experience to student employability was suggested by the
2014 UKCES survey, which concluded that, “relevant work experience was rated by 66% of recruiting employers as being a critical or significant factor looked for in candidates” (p. xiv).

6.2.1. The perceived benefit of the Futures work experience programme

The Futures programme co-ordinator was convinced that the provision of work experience placements sixth-form students was a significant contribution to student employability:

“This year (2013) we started just with BTEC students....keeping it small, trying to roll out a project that works ....but we are looking to roll that out into Year 12 next year so that all students will have an opportunity to carry out work experience placements .... “The students I teach in BTEC did work experience last year and it has hugely benefitted them in deciding what they want to do in a career, so you really notice the difference in communication skills, their self-awareness. There’s a huge difference in students who’ve had exposure to the professional environment and those who haven’t ....For a lot of the students it was quite a shock to find out what was expected of them....” Because they’re used to quite a flexible use of time in the sixth form, they’re not require to be here for the full day. Some of them working a nine to five and some of them seemed to struggle with that and didn’t seem to understand that they wouldn’t be able to do other things during the day, go off to other appointments or make call in the day so it was a big shock to some of the students” (Janice, Futures co-ordinator).

In providing access to work experience placements related to a student’s course of study, the Futures programme provided students with an insight into the workplace which they would not otherwise have gained before completing their sixth-form career. The opportunity for a placement was appreciated by students:

“Well us three did work experience based on our joint BTEC, it was actually really helpful for all of us ... When you’re younger it’s harder to get an insight into the business because they don’t trust you.... Miss is really good and she will always send out emails about different work experience placements to try to get more people to take the opportunity and take that work experience, whereas at my old school, they just give you a list and I think people used to ignore it, and you would do it all yourself but here the Futures team are really supportive if you need any help,” (Adel, BTEC student).
“I actually did work experience with Futures in the area I wanted to study in and it was very helpful.... it was a workplace in engineering and we got experience to work in that environment, and they showed us what they do in different fields and it helped me to see if I wanted to go into that career” (Liselle, A-level student).

Agatha and Kim had not been offered a placement related to their course of study were concerned that they had been overlooked:

“I think that there should be more opportunities in science related subjects ... any work experience subjects is from Art to IC but not much about science subjects to give us an idea of what we could do and what we couldn’t” (Agatha, A-level student).

“We haven’t been offered any work experience in the science section... we have to find our own work experience when it comes to science” (Kim, BTEC student).

However Kim, Dacey and Amara thought that the benefit of work experience could be found in the process of applying for a job, career choice or recommendation for university, rather than the insight it provided into the workplace community of practice:

“They interviewed us which is really good because to get a job you have to go for an interview” (Kim, BTEC student).

“We decided hospitality was not for us and it prepares you because you can see what apprenticeships are available” (Dacey, BTEC student).

“I think universities and jobs accept you not only in grades, but having work experience. Maybe 10 years ago having amazing grades would be enough, but now I don’t think you could just get into a career with just grades” (Amara, A-level student).

Only Yasmin suggested that the benefit of work experience could be found in developing skills which would be valued by an employer, although she did not elaborate on the nature of these skills:
“With all my work experience, that will show that I do go out there and try to get experience and skills and develop them skills, so I can get a good level of apprenticeship” (Yasmin, BTEC student).

Although work experience placements provide students with an insight into the workplace community of practice, personal attributes of employability cannot be implanted in a brief space of time. Resilience is one personal attribute valued by all employers (table 1.2.), but this attribute has been associated with attachment theory, and Bowlby (1980) argues that attachment begins at birth. Furthermore, the link between resilience and self-efficacy was recognised by Bender and Ingram: “more securely attached individuals may be more resilient because of greater beliefs in their own efficacy,” (2018, p.130). It appears to be self-efficacy which is the key to enabling the student to act as an agent of change in order to become an employee (Pinquart et al., 2003). Social efficacy is seen as promoting interpersonal relationships (Bandura, et al., 2001), which are necessary if students are to interact with unfamiliar work colleagues to demonstrate occupational competency.

All students will need to exercise self-efficacy to change their functioning (Sen, 2005) in order to adapt to the workplace community of practice (sees section 2.1.5.). According to Pinquart et al., (2003) “school-based interventions targeted at increasing academic capabilities and self-efficacy would help prepare adolescents for a successful school-to-work transition,” (2003, p.329). However, school intervention requires additional pedagogic practice. The concept of indwelling (Polanyi, 1958), was used by Pyrko et al. (2017) to explain how teacher-mentors can share their tacit knowledge with students to reflect the same knowledge of employability as their students. The teacher-mentor can then develop that knowledge to enable the student to be prepared to change identity through constructing a vocational habitus; as Pyrko et al. observed, “learning entails change in one’s identity, as well as the re-negotiation of meaning of experience,” (p.391).

The change of identity which stems from belonging to the workplace community of practice, is likely to result from situated learning (Lave, 1991), rather than knowledge of being a student. The second section considers the benefit of work experience placements in providing an insight into situated learning.
6.2.2. The impact of work experience

The Futures programme co-ordinator observed that, with the notable exception of an international law firm with a dedicated community programme, providing meaningful work experience placements depended upon her direct intervention, since companies were not equipped to provide placements:

“Experience of working in the city, I know what is expected. I’ve worked for some major international law firms in the UK and in France, so I know what is expected of people in the workplace.... So what I want to do is have a programme which I can give to the employer because I think that to get businesses on board we need to make it easy as possible for them to host a student.... I think meeting the employer is definitely the key.... SL (a partnership company) will run a series of workshops and then interview for the position selected by the employer, other employers want us to do the selection for them and send them a student we this is suitable .... We’ve been really trying to put together a programme when they go to work experience, to make their time really useful and meaningful to the students.... In order for work experience placements to be effective we need to provide guidance to employers” (Janice, Futures coordinator).

The provision of meaningful work experience placements seemed dependent upon the time available to the Futures programmes co-ordinator, rather than upon employers. Three of the four partnership employers interviewed for the pilot study saw work experience as an opportunity for the student to discover whether or not job in their sector of the economy reflected student interests, but they expected the school to provide suitable candidates (table 3.4.). Employers did not see work experience as an opportunity to develop the personal attributes of employability of those students who were unlikely to be considered suitable for a placement and therefore most in need of support. The Futures co-ordinator also saw no benefit from introducing compulsory placements:

“I made it clear that I did not think we should be forcing students to take a placement .... if they don’t want to take a placement, it is going to be damaging to the school’s reputation, the relationship with the business, and it’s not going to be helpful to students .... I haven’t had much feedback from students so I think there’s a lot of work to be done with the students in educating
them about the importance of work experience placements, getting them to think” (Janice, Futures co-ordinator).

Work experience placements benefitted those students who had sufficient cultural and social capital (see section 2.1.2.) to adapt to the expectations of an employer:

“The one in my tutor group is already very confident, well-mannered and he’s such a pleasure so that you know when he came back was full of life and happy with what he had done, you know that he will do well, those are the type of kids that go for opportunities. Anyway so we might need to work on encouraging the others” (Carol, Y13 tutor).

Nevertheless, the student remains a student during a work experience placement, and work experience provides only a brief insight into the workplace. The importance of context was suggested by Diane:

“Some students become familiar and almost pally with you. It’s strange to think of them as behaving in a more professional way....I know they’ve been on work experience and they’ve done very well so they must be capable of doing it. I know from work experience placements that they change, but I don’t see that” (Diane, Y13 tutor).

Diane’s observation implied that students hold onto their identities as students until they find themselves in the different social situation of the workplace, and that a brief work experience placement did not have a lasting effect. Ben and Elaine observed that part-time employment provided students with a more prolonged, and a more beneficial experience of the workplace, which was recognised by the Futures co-ordinator:

“I’ve got a real good understanding of their need to gain work experience and have part-time jobs, and how these can develop their self-esteem, self-confidence and independence” (Ben, Y13 tutor).

“The goal we have is the achievement of students, the primary concern of all my friends, whatever they do, is money, and that fosters a different environment. Mistakes are potentially much more costly” (Elaine, Y12 tutor).
“At the moment some of the students seem to be focussed on getting a job so that they can work part-time and earn some money” (Janice, Futures co-ordinator).

Katie, Amara and Mohammed had been able to provide their own prolonged work experience, however they were more concerned that it provided them with an advantage in their post-sixth form progression, rather than develop their employability:

“I volunteer selling cup cakes for the Hackney Youth Theatre and stuff similar to that ..... You need to stand out from other people who may not have that experience, cause if you have that experience you will stand out” (Katie, A-level student).

“To be honest, I wasn’t too much into the Futures process because in my old school I’ve done so much. Like I have worked for the BBC, I’ve done all this amazing stuff so when I came here I decided to focus on my A-levels and work so I didn’t involve myself too much with the process” (Amara, A-level student).

“Within the last five years I’ve had a lot of work experience, I think with 20 financial institutions, and at each of them they have been explaining to me the effects of university and going through apprenticeship” (Mohammed, BTEC student).

Unless meaningful work experience placements are explicitly centred on developing employability, their value to the student is limited. However this requires an insight into student employability which employers are not equipped to recognise. Employers are primarily concerned with the organisation of work, rather than the education of students on a placement. The growth in the provision of meaningful placements proved to be slow. The 2015-16 Futures review showed only a small 8% increase in the number of students who had secured a placement (Appendix F) compared to the previous year. This was likely to have been due to a lack of available meaningful placements, rather than a lack of involvement by the Futures programme co-ordinator. However the work experience programme encouraged a partnership between school and employers.

6.2.3 Partnership with employers
The involvement of employers in the curriculum can contribute to bridging the gap between learning an academic curriculum and understanding the expectations of employers. John, Mike and Greta recognised the importance of bridging the gap:

“What are the skills they (employers) are expecting to see in the young workforce, what are their expectations? .... I think in the subjects it is important to build a bridge between the (employability) skills in the lessons” (John, Y13 tutor).

“There should be an emphasis on starting something new you haven’t really had experience of this before, you should be teaching students to be self-aware of their situation, to ask as many questions as they like, you know. How do they go about solving a problem when they’ve had no experience of it in the past? .... developing relationships, asking for feedback, seeing how they are progressing in the workplace, which I think is a different skill to independent learning and learning on your own” (Mike, Y13 tutor).

“The main thing for me is their attitude in the workplace and the students behaving as adults in the working environment, but there’s only so many times you can tell them that they should not be on their phones, and they should not be doing this. This is unfortunately down to them so I don’t really know what the Futures team could do to combat that. Unless they got an employer who gave them examples from things that they’ve done like being on their phone or doing this or anything because it’s just another teacher saying you shouldn’t be on your phone” (Greta, Y12 tutor).

Unfortunately the involvement of employers in the sixth-form curriculum tended to reflect self-interest, rather than a desire to develop student employability. A condition of building a hotel near the school was that the hotel chain employ local school leavers:

“We’ve agreed that they will work with us in delivery of hospitality course with the view that they will recruit students from the course to positions in the hotel, so the positions ... it depends on the entry level but we are meeting next month to finalise the job roles that they are going to have available and input they are going to have on the course” (Janice, Futures co-ordinator).
Although partnership employers can direct academic study towards employment opportunities, involvement in the curriculum was seen by local technology companies as a means of recruitment:

“Students can specialise in a particular area of technology website development, communications, telecommunications, internet marketing, so they will have a guaranteed job for 12 months, with the training, with the view that when they’ve finished they will go into full time employment with the company that has hosted them for their apprenticeship or with another tech city business, .... So we are working with an organisation called Techcity, which is a collection of businesses around here, who have worked together because they have identified that they are struggling to recruit in their industry. So we started working together with an organisation called.... citizens, who work with churches and groups in the local community ....they’ve come up with a programme called tech city stars and they’re looking to recruit Y13 students who are going into apprenticeship schemes” (Janice, Futures co-ordinator).

A successful sixth-form career at The Old School continued to be defined by academic results, which were used to identify an appropriate post sixth-form destination:

“There grades will be a deciding factor to see whether H.E. is suitable for them .... There might be students who want to go to H.E. but we do not feel it is a suitable option, either due to the personality of the student, work ethic or their grades”(Janice, Futures co-ordinator).

In primarily promoting the post-sixth form destination of students, the Futures programme was following statutory careers guidance.

6.3. Summary

This chapter has presented and discussed findings from the research data which addressed the third research question: ‘How do students and staff experience the Futures programme and what impact do they perceive that it has on student employability?’ Data from interviews with the Futures programme co-ordinator, sixth-form staff and students, and documentary evidence from the Futures programme, were collated into two themes which emerged from the coding process, and which were then aligned to the third research question.
The first theme explored the link between statutory careers guidance and the Futures programme. The design of the programme was intended to satisfy statutory guidance, supporting students in making to their choice of a post sixth-form destination by providing information, and recording student destinations. However a wealth of careers information tended to confuse students (Galliot and Graham, 2014) and student post sixth-form decisions tended to be influenced by family and social experience rather than the Futures programme (Colley et.al. 2007; Bates, 1991 and 1994). Although there seemed to be no poverty of aspiration, making the transition from being a student to becoming an employee depended upon the student’s capacity for self-efficacy and agentive action (see section 2.1.3.) rather than information advice and guidance (Dfe 2014b). Learning in the workplace is a social activity, and social mobility can become problematic unless the student is able to change function (Sen, 1997) and identity to belong to the workplace community of practice. The change of function might be addressed by the inclusion of Higher Apprenticeships in the Futures programme because they provide situated learning (Lave 1991), but their credibility is likely to rely upon a shift in the perceptions of students, parents and teachers (Saraswat, 2016). Perhaps more significant is the employer mover towards recruiting students from the sixth form in order that the employer can develop student employability (Hamnet and Baker, 2012).

The second theme examined the introduction by the Futures programme of work experience placements, which were considered by the programme co-ordinator to be a valuable means of providing students with an insight into the workplace. Her intention was to offer meaningful placements for all students related to their courses of study. However progress proved to be slow (Appendix F), perhaps not least because employers were not equipped to provide meaningful placements, and relied upon the co-ordinator. Unfortunately, in selecting appropriate students for a placement, in line with the wishes of employers, the Futures programme was likely to reject those students most in need of developing their personal attributes of employability (Bourdieu, 1986). Although part-time employment would seem to offer students more insight into the workplace than a brief work experience placement, the student remained a student until entering the full-time workplace as an employee (Pinquart et.al.2003). However, the primary purpose of the Futures programme was to identify and support student post sixth-form destinations to satisfy statutory careers advice.
In the concluding chapter, the findings and discussion of the data are summarised and the implications of the development of student employability are identified.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

Introduction

The study addresses the issue of student employability, which has remained a, “perennial issue in the debate about industry and education,” (Keep, 2012b, p.363). There is an apparent contradiction between DfE expectations of sixth-form students and employer expectations of student recruits. Although revised statutory guidance (DfE, 2014b) considers reliable academic qualifications to be the best means of informing employers of student potential, employers are influenced by appropriate personal attributes of employability (CBI, 2016), given that student recruits have appropriate academic qualifications.

The study agrees with Bourdieu (1986), that academic qualifications are embodied in the student, but it departs from his emphasis on social and cultural capital, by adopting Sen’s (2005) concept of ‘functioning’ and recognition that the individual can free himself/herself from social positioning. The student recruit to the workplace can construct an identity which enables him/her to join the workplace community of practice (Lave, 1991). Applying personal attributes
to construct a vocational habitus (see section 2.1.4.) depends upon the student’s self-efficacy (Lüftenegger et al. 2012). Without joining the workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5.) the student recruit to the workplaces will find it difficult to interact with unfamiliar work colleagues and adapt to unfamiliar work practices in order to demonstrate occupational competency.

The first section of the chapter examines the main findings of my research, which address the three research questions suggested by the literature review see (table 2.3). The second section offers six implications for The Old School sixth-form if student employability is to be developed. The third section of this chapter identifies the study’s original contribution to knowledge, and the fourth section makes three suggestions for future research in order to develop the study. The fifth section reflects on my personal journey in completing the study and the last section offers some final thoughts on the development of student employability.

7.1. The main findings and discussion of the research

The main findings and discussion of the research addressed three research questions emerged from the literature review:

RQ1. What are sixth-form student perceptions and experiences of employability in an English school sixth-form?
RQ 2: What role does sixth-form staff perceive they have in helping to develop student employability?
RQ 3: How do students and staff experience the Futures programme and what impact do they perceive it has on the student capacity for employability?

The research questions are based upon a social constructivist paradigm, that the meaning of employability for staff and students is individually derived from social experience. Nevertheless their responses to semi-structured interview questions can be collated into themed consensus because both staff and students are actors in the same social context of an academically orientated sixth-form education and employment opportunities.
Although employers recognise the importance of personal attributes of employability, both employers (Teach First Report, 2015; Impetus Report, 2014) and statutory careers guidance (DfE, 2014b) have relied upon transmitted knowledge to inform students of appropriate personal attributes, through information, advice and guidance. However, the study has argued that students can only become employees through situated learning (Andrews, 2012; Costley et al. 2010; Hirtle, 1996 and Lave, 1991); unless a student can exercise self-efficacy (Lüftenegger et al. 2012) to apply his/her personal attributes to joining a workplace community of practice (section 2.1.5), the student, as an employee, is unlikely to be able to demonstrate occupational competency (Wenger-Trayner, 2015; Omidvar and Kislov, 2013). Without being prepared to act as an agent of change (see section 2.1.3) on entry to a workplace for the first time, the student may search for a workplace which is compatible with his/her social construct of reality, and which satisfies his/her social expectations (Ng and Feldman, 2007).

The first research question considered sixth-form student expectations of the workplace based upon their understanding of employability.

7.1.1. RQ1: What are sixth-form student perceptions and experiences of employability?

Students were interviewed from the 2015-16 intake of The Old school sixth-form in four focus groups. Interview data from the student research sample (n=18) were coded and collated into three themes:

1. The employability of post sixth-form student destinations.
2. Student expectations of being an employee.
3. Student personal attributes of employability.

Theme 1: Employability of post sixth form student destinations

Students in The Old School sixth-form could follow one of three post sixth-form pathways: H.E., Higher Apprenticeships, or employment. The fact that 76% of sixth form students in Year 13 had secured a university place in 2016 (Appendix E), including BTEC students, suggested that students had absorbed the collective social constructivist assumption of the sixth-form that
entry to H.E. was the desirable outcome of sixth-form education. In line with the national trend (UCAS, 2017), students were not dissuaded from university entry by the abolition of grants or the rise in tuition fees. The majority of students assumed that the experience of gaining a university degree would improve their employability, irrespective of the degree subject.

However personal attributes of employability have become a necessary supplement to academic qualifications (CBI report 2016; Nickson et. al. 2000) through the influence of the service sector of the UK economy, which provides by far the largest number of employment opportunities (see table 1.1.). The study recognises Bourdieu’s argument (1986)) that academic qualifications are embodied in the student and that student social and cultural capital (see section 2.1.2.) can have a significant influence on the ability of the student to join the workplace community of practice (see section 2.1.5). Nevertheless, inherited social and cultural capital need not block student aspirations (Goldthorpe, 1996).

The students who had secured a university place did not distinguish between the technical skills which stemmed from academic qualifications and personal attributes of employability. Those relatively few students who had decided upon a Higher Apprenticeship or employment, for their post sixth-form destination, argued that university would not equip them with the experience needed to enter employment and that they would have an income rather than incur debt. Their choice may have been due to socio-economic background, but it was not the purpose of the research to identify the reasons behind student choice. Nevertheless, student choice of a preferred career was likely to provide the motivation necessary to act as an agent of change when entering a workplace for the first time.

Theme 2: Student expectations of being an employee

Several students recognised that the benefits of being an employee were the product of contributing to the organisation of work, but most students expected tangible rewards from employment, without apparent appreciation that the workplace was not intended for their benefit as employees. Although financial return has been recognised as the most significant benefit of employment (Gbadamosi et.al. 2015), some students also expected job satisfaction, and others looked for a balance of income, job satisfaction and promotion. Those students who prioritised income and promotion were likely to depend upon their employer’s recognition of their occupational competency; however most students did not appreciate that both income
and promotion would be dependent upon meeting employer expectations through their contribution to the organisation of work as employees.

Students were prepared to change jobs in order to find a workplace which was compatible with their social expectations and which could accommodate their other role identities, following a national trend (Akkermans et.al. 2013; Wolf Report, 2011). However this was likely to be a random search, since it would be unlikely that a workplace community of practice would reflect the social and cultural capital of the student, unless the student recruit to the workplace was prepared to act as agent of change (see section 2.1.3)

Reliance upon transmitted knowledge of work related skills, or personal attributes of employability, ignored situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991), however student expectations of the workplace would encourage the student recruit to the workplace to act as an agent of change. The third theme identifies student perceptions of their personal attributes of employability.

Theme 3: Student personal attributes of employability.

The students who were confident of entering a workplace assumed that their capacity to interact with staff and students in the sixth-form would enable them to interact with unfamiliar work colleagues. However, being a student in the supportive learning environment of a sixth-form, and being able to choose friends from a student body of the same age, is different to being an employee in the independent learning environment of the workplace with unfamiliar work colleagues who may belong to a different generation. The student’s capacity to become an employee is likely to depend upon his/her self-efficacy (Lüftenegger et. al. 2012; Bandura, 1997) in adapting to the workplace community of practice, change functioning (Sen, 1997) and accepting the impact on his/her identity (Fejesa and Kopsman, 2014) from being a student to being an employee.

Although two students stated that they were prepared to ignore the opinions of work colleagues, the esteem of work colleagues and consequent self-esteem are significant benefits of belonging to the workplace community of practice (Robert et.al. 2013; Maslow, 1986). Without being prepared for entry to the workplace for the first time, sixth-form students were
likely to find it difficult to identify with the workplace and demonstrate occupational competency. However, the empathy which can develop between student and teacher provides an opportunity for the sixth-form to develop student employability. The second research question considered the role of the tutor in developing student employability.

7.1.2 RQ2: What role does sixth-form staff perceive they have in helping students to develop their employability?

The delivery of the development of student employability depends upon the perception of student employability by sixth-form members of staff. The sixth-form tutors (n=11) were chosen for interview because they seemed most likely to know the personal attributes of their students – only one tutor declined to be interviewed. The interview response of the tutors was coded and the codes were collated into three themes:

1. Tutors perceptions of being a sixth-form tutor.
2. Tutor perceptions of student readiness to enter the workplace.
3. The potential of tutors to develop student employability.

Theme 1: Tutor Perceptions of being a sixth-form tutor.

The only common responsibility of the sixth-form tutors was the registration of students; otherwise each tutor’s perception of the role of a sixth-form tutor seemed to depend upon the personality of the tutor. All the tutors were prepared to support student passage through the sixth-form, but there was a wide variation in the tutor engagement with sixth-form students. Most tutors were confident that they could interact with their students, but only within the context of the sixth-form, since there is a difference between being a social worker and a sixth-form tutor (Rosenblatt, 2002). Although students welcomed the support of a tutor in their passage through the sixth-form, they were particularly concerned that their tutor should know them well enough to write references for them.

Tutorial time in The Old School sixth-form relied upon a daily 20 minutes registration period, and support was only possible for those students who were not timetabled to be elsewhere in the sixth-form consortium. However, tutor support for student progress through the sixth-form could be extended to develop student employability since interaction between student and
teacher is the foundation of good pedagogic practice (Priestley, 2015; Battro, 2013; Bernstein-Yamashiro and Nan, 2013) and the student expects to learn from the tutor/teacher (Bowlby, 1988). The gap between the social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2002) of the tutor and student is not insurmountable since both belong to the sixth-form community of practice, but the interaction between student and teacher depends upon teacher agency (Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Frost, 2006). The capacity of the tutor to develop student employability was therefore likely to depend upon the tutor’s perception of student readiness to enter the workplace.

**Theme 2: Tutor perceptions of student readiness to enter the workplace.**

Tutors were unimpressed by the readiness of students to enter the workplace. They recognised that student pursuit of a post sixth-form destination was influenced their social construct of reality, which included student perceptions of academic qualifications, rather than an appreciation of personal attributes of employability. Furthermore, being a sixth-form student did not prepare students to become employees because the sixth-form provided a supportive learning environment, whereas the workplace required independent learning. Tutors considered that the education bubble did not enable students to meet the expectations of employers.

Although sixth-form tutors were able to identify personal attributes of employability appropriate for the workplace from their own experience, they offered no suggestion as to how students could acquire those personal attributes, except through a transformation of the sixth-form curriculum or a national organisation. The tutors did not consider the significance of student self-efficacy in applying their personal attributes to join the workplace community of practice.

Without awareness of how to become an employee, each student could expect to search for a compatible workplace after leaving formal education. Many of the tutors themselves had experienced a change of jobs until they found a workplace which suited them, and they expected their students to do the same. Nevertheless, a random search for a compatible workplace could be avoided if students were prepared to adapt to a workplace which enables them to enter their preferred career. The interaction between student and teacher in the sixth-
form would seem to provide an opportunity for the tutor to develop student employability and avoid a random search for a compatible workplace.

Theme 3: The potential of sixth form tutors to develop student employability.

Both students and tutors belonged to a sixth-form community of practice (Lineham and McCarthy, 2000) in which students recognised that teachers were a source of knowledge. However, although tutors were able to advise students from their own experience, and identify appropriate personal attributes of employability, they thought that they were not equipped to provide support for the development of student employability, without training. Nevertheless, tutors were aware that students would not find the transition from student to employee to be straightforward.

One tutor suggested that the concept of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994) would be helpful, but this would ignore situated learning (Lave, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). Another tutor suggested a national organisation to train teachers, but given removal of careers education to school in 2011 (DfE, 2011b) this would seem to be unlikely. However, the development of student employability can occur through an extension of the sixth-form curriculum, with sixth-form tutors acting as mentors.

It is likely that the tutor would need to be trained as a mentor since being a mentor requires an extension of existing pedagogic practice (Papadimos, 2013), placing the development of employability in the world of the student (Bruner, 2004). It is important that the mentee views the mentor as being competent (Sandner, 2015), and therefore the mentor should have a clear perception of student employability. The input of the mentor cannot be a substitute experience of the workplace (Farnsworth et.al. 2016), but the mentor can prepare the student to act as an agent of change when entering the workplace for the first time as an employee. The student can be mentored to adapt to the workplace through familiarity with the means of joining the workplace community of practice (Eraut, 2004). The third research question considers the impact on student employability of the Futures programme, and consequently of statutory careers guidance.
7.1.3. RQ3: How do students and staff experience the Futures programme and what impact do they perceive that it has on student employability?

The Futures vocational education programme was introduced in 2012 in response to Parliament handing responsibility for careers education to schools in the previous year. The programme satisfied statutory careers guidance (Appendix C), which was assessed by Ofsted. In addition the programme introduced work experience placements for sixth-form students, which belonged to statutory advice rather than guidance. The impact of the programme on student employability was examined by data from interviews with the sixth-form tutors and the Futures programme co-ordinator (n=12), the student sample (n=18), and documentary evidence from the programme (Appendices C-H). The data were coded and the codes were collated into two themes:

1. The link between statutory guidance and the Futures programme.
2. The contribution of work experience to student employability.

Theme 1: The link between statutory guidance and the Futures programme.

The main aim of the Futures programme was to satisfy statutory career guidance (DfE, 2014b), especially the obligation to identify an appropriate post sixth-form destination for each sixth-form student and support each student to achieve his/her destination (Appendix D). Sixth-form students were expected by both statutory careers guidance and the Futures programme to make their own career decisions, even though the freedom to make a career decision can limit the choice of a post sixth form destination. (Galliot and Graham, 2014). Those students who were unable to secure a post sixth-form destination continued to receive support from the Futures programme.

The impact of the Futures programme on student employability, and consequently statutory careers guidance, was questionable. Although the Futures programme provided a great deal of careers information, through visiting speakers and an annual week long workshop (Appendix H), only three of the eighteen students interviewed credited the Futures programme with helping them to decide their post sixth form destination. Although the Futures programme
provided a range of opportunities for external work experience placements, summer schools, and employment, (Appendix G), these were likely to attract those students who had sufficient social and cultural capital to interact with unfamiliar others in the unfamiliar social situation of the workplace.

Since belonging to a community of practice is considered to be a social and cultural activity (Lave and Wenger, 1991), the sixth-form community of practice enables vocational education to mediate between the student’s social background and the demands of the workplace (Bates, 1994 and 1991). Without intervention, the sixth–form student may follow a path which reflects his/her social positioning, irrespective of academic qualifications. Although some tutors recognised that university entry was not suitable for all students, all tutors were impressed by the support provided by the Futures programme for university entry. Nevertheless, several tutors were aware of the need to develop student personal attributes of employability. The Futures programme co-ordinator argued that the development of student employability required a change of sixth-form curriculum priorities, especially since students thought that university entry would enhance employability. The next section considers the impact of the Futures programme provision of meaningful work experience placements on student employability.

Theme 2: The contribution of sixth-form work experience to student employability

The provision of work meaningful work experience placements followed statutory careers advice (DfE, 2015b) rather than guidance. However statutory advice did not seem to consider employers’ capacity to provide meaningful work experience. The Futures programme co-ordinator argued that employers were not equipped to provide meaningful work experience placements and that the provision of placements would depend upon her direct involvement (see pp. 146-147). Partnership employers expected the Futures programme to provide suitable candidates for placements (see pilot study, section 3.2.2.), although those students most in need of extending their social and cultural capital to develop their employability were likely to be considered unsuitable.

Nevertheless, the programme co-ordinator observed that students returned from work experience placements with improved personal attributes of employability, and one tutor
observed that students changed their attitude to being supervised by teachers on their return. However, the study argues that, unless the student learns to adapt to a workplace, he/she was unlikely to effect the transition from being a student to becoming an employee able to demonstrate occupational competency. Personal attributes, such as resilience, are the product of social capital (Bowlby, 1980). It is also the confidence of confidence of social efficacy (Bandura, 1977), a product of interaction with life experience, which likely to determine the capacity of the student recruit to adapt to the workplace community of practice.

Work experience provided only a brief insight into the workplace, which did not encourage the student to identify with the workplace. Part-time employment would seem to offer students a more prolonged and meaningful insight; however the student remains a student until becoming a full-time employee. It is the partnership with employers which has much more potential than work experience placements to develop student employability, involving employers in sixth-form curriculum provision and enabling students to become familiar with employer expectations of employees. Increasingly, employers prefer student recruits not to have a degree since being taught to contribute to the organisation of work is more beneficial than having academic qualifications, and employers tended to provide work experience placements to enable students to make an appropriate choice of career rather than develop student employability (see pilot study p. 3.2.2.).

The next section offers six implications for the sixth-form curriculum for the development of student employability.

7.2. Implications

The literature review left little doubt that personal attributes of employability are a necessary supplement to academic qualifications for student recruits to the workplace. These personal attributes cannot be transmitted, but stem from the social and cultural capital accumulated by each student through life experience. Since the development of sixth-form student employability is individualised, it can only be delivered by members of staff acting as mentors rather than teachers.
However, rather than expecting statutory careers guidance to change in order to accommodate the argument of this study, the six implications for the sixth-form development of student employability below are intended to be an extension of existing sixth-form practice:

1. Sixth-form employability mentors should be identified from sixth-form teachers who are willing and able to develop an empathetic understanding of sixth-form students. The staff chosen may not necessarily be sixth-form tutors, but are likely to require training to act as mentors.

2. Each student should be assigned a discreet timetable allocation for employability mentoring of one session each half-term. This is allocation should not be used by the mentor to attempt to transmit social and cultural capital, but to introduce the student to the process of change from being a student to becoming an employee.

3. The employability mentor should introduce the sixth-form student to a strategy which will enable membership of the workplace community of practice (figure 7.1):

**Figure 7.1. Strategy for the development of student employability**

An exploration of the student’s social construct of reality and social positioning which is product of **social and cultural capital.**

Identify the social and cultural consensus of the workplace **community** of practice.

Consider how the student can act as an **agent of change** in applying his/her **self-efficacy** to construct a **vocational habitus**, which will enable the student as an employee to interact with unfamiliar colleagues and adapt to unfamiliar work practices.

4. Students should be made aware that their social goals of income, promotion and job satisfaction depend upon their contribution to the organisation of work.
5. Students should be made aware that their social and cultural capital is untried in the workplace, and that although work experience provides an insight into the workplace community of practice, it is unlikely to replicate their eventual full-time workplace.

6. Since statutory guidance impacts on the distribution of resources, recognition of the need for the provision of mentoring for each sixth form student would benefit from its inclusion in statutory careers guidance. Otherwise, student mentoring in employability is likely to depend upon the resources available to each sixth-form.

The implications of the research are specific to the case study; however the context of English sixth-form education is similar to that of The Old School sixth-form. State funded sixth-forms are subject to the same academic curriculum and statutory careers guidance, while the service industry dominates employment opportunities throughout the economy. Sixth-form tutors are initially appointed as subject teachers and the effectiveness of pedagogic practice tends to be determined by and the capacity of the teacher to interact with students. Consequently the implications of this research can be applied to other state funded sixth-forms, though the resources available to vocational education will depend upon each school’s priorities.

As an experienced secondary education practitioner I intended the implications of this research to be transferable, through and extension of existing sixth-form practice. Senior school management and classroom teachers are both reluctant to introduce change, unless required by statutory guidance, because of potential disruption to the school delivery of the National Curriculum, on which they are assessed by Ofsted. Consequently, the original contribution to knowledge of this thesis does not depend upon a change in existing practice but a use of existing practice to develop student employability.

7.3. Original contribution to knowledge

The original contribution to knowledge of this study is that it combines existing sixth-form practice with academic research on employability, and employer expectations of employees, in order to develop sixth-form student employability in preparation for entry to the workplace for the first time. Although the study does not introduce a unique concept, it combines disparate concepts in a new way (Trafford and Leshem, 2008) to resolve the contradiction between DfE
expectations of students and employer expectation of student recruits, through an extension of existing sixth-form practice. The resolution of the contradiction recognises 5 key concepts:

1. Student personal attributes of employability is unlikely to be transmitted through information, advice and guidance, because the employee relies upon situated learning in the workplace community of practice.

2. Student personal attributes of employability are the product of social and cultural capital derived from the meaning each student has attached to social experience, however the student can change function from being a student to become an employee.

3. In order to join the workplace community of practice on entry to a workplace for the first time, the student can employ a strategy which enables the student recruit to act as an agent of change, using self-efficacy to identify and construct an appropriate vocational habitus (see table 7.1.).

4. Student preparation for the workplace through academic qualification is not sufficient to facilitate occupational competency without the development of student employability, and the sixth-form can take responsibility for developing effective student employability.

5. The sixth-form can greatly enhance its development of student employability through teacher-mentors, who can introduce students to the strategy for becoming an employee by entering the world of the student. The only change required in sixth-form practice is the allocation of discrete mentor time for each student, since the sixth-form provides an opportunity for teachers to establish an empathetic professional relationship with student.

7.4. Suggestions for further research

The study has addressed employer concern with student employability by better preparing sixth-form students for entry to a full-time workplace for the first time. Three further pieces of research can add substance to findings of the study:
1. An inquiry into the employability perceptions of students before entry into the sixth-form, to investigate if the development of student employability should be introduced to the school curriculum prior to the sixth-form.

2. A comparative study with other sixth-forms, in other geographical locations, to identify differences in student and staff perceptions of employability, to investigate the availability of partnerships with local employers, and to reflect on the influence of resources allocated by the school to sixth-form vocational education.

3. A comparative study to consider the willingness and ability of sixth-form staff in other sixth-forms to empathise with students and act as a student mentor in order to develop student employability.

7.5. Reflections on my personal journey through the course of the inquiry

I was an Associate Lecturer on the Open University M.Ed module E805 (equity, diversity and inclusion), when I came across data in the module materials which pointed to employer dissatisfaction with the work readiness of student recruits. As an experienced practitioner in secondary education, it was disturbing to discover that academic qualifications were insufficient to satisfy employer expectations. Students, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, could work hard to achieve examination results necessary for entry to their preferred career, and yet find themselves unable to demonstrate workplace competency. Since I had found it difficult to make the transition from being a student to being an employee, the topic was especially appealing as a piece of research.

Being able to use The Old School as a case study, where had spent my entire teaching career, provided ease of access to staff and students, however it was some time before I was able to sufficiently detach myself from the sixth-form Futures vocational education programme to view it as other than an invaluable contribution to sixth-form student lifelong learning. As a researcher, informed by a literature review, I came to see the Futures programme as a means of satisfying school responsibility for statutory careers guidance, rather than a means of easing the entry of students into employment.
As a previous Head of Year at The Old School sixth-form, I could also be accused of bias in assuming that the empathy which can develop between student and teacher cannot be replicated at other levels of formal education. However my assumption was reinforced by the experience of an ex-student, who I had taught since he had entered The Old School, but who had continued his education at a prestigious F.E. college. While in his last year at the London School of Economics, he had paid me a visit in school and confided that he wished he had entered The Old School sixth form to be amongst teachers who knew him and were interested in his personal development, rather than merely in his potential examination grade.

As an experienced practitioner, I wanted my inquiry to be of practical value in preparing sixth-form students for employability, although I was initially uncertain of its direction. I recognised that students, as employees, were likely to rely upon social and cultural capital to interact with unfamiliar work colleagues and adapt to unfamiliar work practices on entry to a workplace, however appropriate social and cultural capital could not be learnt by belonging to the sixth-form. The student remained a student during a brief work experience placement or part-time employment. It was only through the literature review that I began to perceive the solution of entering the workplace with a strategy for the student to act as an agent of change when entering the workplace for the first time.

I had discovered, from an early age, that interacting with unfamiliar others in unfamiliar social situations changed my social construct of reality. It had proved necessary for me to act as an agent of change at the age of 12 in order to translate my Lancashire dialect into Middle English, if I was to be accepted into my Direct Grant School community of practice. This led me to adopt an interpretivist paradigm, which also became relevant in my transformation from a student to an employee and from practitioner to an academic.

As an educational practitioner, I recognised the collective social construct that examination qualifications would lead to employment. However the pilot study and the literature review, provided a more balanced perspective of student employability, leading me to recognise the contradiction between the emphasis of formal education on academic achievement, and employer expectations that student recruits possessed appropriate personal attributes of employability.
7.6. Final thoughts

As an experienced secondary education practitioner rather than an employer, I recognised that the development of student employability can be an issue for the supported learning environment of school education. School provides both academic qualifications and lifelong learning, which can be extended in the sixth-form to include employability. The impact of the school on student lifelong learning is a product of the empathetic relationship which can develop between teacher and student, with the teacher acting as a mentor rather than simply a transmitter of received knowledge.

Although employment may be delayed by entry to H.E., the sixth–form provides the best opportunity for the development of student employability. The necessary support and guidance is unlikely to be provided at university because the organisation of learning creates a distance between student and lecturer, and lecturers in colleges of Further Education also lack regular contact with students. On the other hand, employers have shown no understanding of how student recruits can acquire personal attributes appropriate for a workplace.

The issue of student employability cannot be resolved by being critical of formal education, or employer expectations of student recruits, since the student has to deal with the world as it exists. Central government has intervened through statutory careers guidance, but this guidance was intended to support a DfE agenda of avoiding students becoming NEETS, rather than address the issue of student employability. Although academic qualifications enable students to enter a preferred career, occupational competency depends upon the student recruit being able to apply himself/herself to the workplace community of practice.

It seems surprising that statutory careers guidance has not effectively addressed the preparation of student employability to the satisfaction of employer organisations, considering the time which has elapsed since the de-industrialisation of the UK economy and the emergence of personal attributes as a significant element of student employability. Without the introduction into the sixth-form curriculum of the implications of this study, it seems likely that student occupational competency will continue to depend upon the self-efficacy of the student rather than their career aspirations, or academic qualifications.
It is perhaps my awareness of the need for change, from personal experience, which has encouraged me to identify a strategy for change. It is also my professional experience which has enabled me to identify a practical means of developing sixth-form student employability through the existing sixth-form curriculum.

References

Access Project (2014) online: https://www.theaccessproject.org.uk


City and Guilds (2013) Making Education Work: Preparing Young People for the Workplace, pub. online: www.cityandguilds.com/~makingeducation%20pdf.ashx


Confederation of British Industry (2013), Changing the Pace, CBI / Pearson Education skills survey pub. online: www.cbi.org.uk.


Department for Education (2014b) *Careers guidance and inspiration in schools: Statutory guidance for governing bodies, school leaders and school staff,* pub. online: www.gcgp.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/.../Careers_Statutory_Guidance_April_2014.pdf


Department of Education (2015b) , *Post-16 work experience as a part of 16 to 19 study programmes and traineeships, Departmental advice for post-16 education and training providers,* pub. online: www.gov.uk/government/publications
Department for Education (2015c), *Information on funding work experience in 16 to 19 study programmes*. pub. DfE Educational funding agency.


Department of Education (2017), *Careers guidance and inspiration in schools. Statutory guidance for governing bodies, school leaders and school staff*, pub. online: www.gov.uk/government/publications


Further Education Week (2017) 14.7 2017, pub online www.fewwek.co.uk


Pintrich, P.R. (2002), The Role of Metacognitive Knowledge in Learning, Teaching and Assessing, *Theory into Practice*, vol. 41, no.4, pp. 219-225


Skills funding Agency (2016) online: https://www.gov.uk/government/.../skills-funding-agency-common-funding-rules


Teach First (2015) Careers Education in the Classroom: The role of Teachers in making young people work ready, pub. online https://www.teachfirst.org.uk

ThinkForward (2011) www.thinkforward.org.uk


UCAS (2017) *At the heart of connecting people to higher education*, pub. online: https://www.ucas.com/.../applicants-uk-higher-education-down-5-uk-students


## Appendices

### Appendix A: Ethnicity and gender of the 2015-16 intake of sixth-form students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Year 12 108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White English</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Year 13 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Somali</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East European</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other African</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Nigerian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West European</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other mixed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C &amp; S America</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>152</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>183</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix B: GCSE, A-level and B-Tech exam results August 2014
5 GCSE passes A*-C including Maths and English: 84%
5 GCSE passes A* - C not including Maths and/or English 90%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B-Tech courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A-level pass rate 100%
A-level grades A*-C 80%
A-level grades A* or A 40%
A-level Sciences, English Lit, and Business A*-B 60%

Appendix C: Futures programme review 2015-16 compared to DfE statutory careers guidance 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Futures Review 2015-16</th>
<th>DfE statutory guidance 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Futures Career Insights: A programme events throughout the year allows students to gain</td>
<td>Students should be well-informed when making subject and career decisions (paragraph 7).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge of a wide range of different industries with guest speakers and networking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with industry professionals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Futures Smart Choice Workshops: a series of workshops focussing on available</td>
<td>Help every pupil develop high aspirations and consider a range of careers (paragraph 9).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pathways and the qualities, skills and experiences that are required for these.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futures and employer mentoring programme: Students who were not applying for university</td>
<td>High quality mentoring which can develop character and confidence the needed to build a successful career their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opportunity to work with a mentor on CVs and Cover letter.</td>
<td>paragraph 10).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futures Employability Programme: students a number of employability workshops</td>
<td>Work in partnership with employers, attend Higher Education. and professional which include:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
communication, interviews, training (Paragraph 19), resilience techniques and building professional networks.

All Y12 students have the opportunity to apply for work experience positions organised with our partner businesses. High quality work experience which reflects student interest and course of study (paragraph 10).

Appendix D: The 2015-16 policy of the Futures Programme

AIM: The purpose of the Futures programme is to ensure the successful progression of (The Old School) students into high quality further education training and employment. The Futures programme works towards achieving this aim:

1. Maintaining existing and developing further links with employers for the purpose of making available for our students: Full-time employment opportunities, part-time employment opportunities, employer talks and workshop, vocational learning opportunities, work experience and internships, all students on vocational courses, BTEC Business, Hospitality, ICT & Science will be offered the opportunity to carry out a quality two week work experience placement in Year 12.

2. Developing and lead an impactful work experience programme across the school. Supporting departments to develop vocational links to support the delivery of their subject and support the progression of students in the subject related careers.

3. Overseeing the delivery of careers education and guidance in line with the Careers Education Policy which was reviewed in 2014. The Policy states that the duty on schools is to secure independent careers guidance for all year 8-13 pupils. The revised policy also states that schools must raise aspirations of all pupils, encouraging them to overcome barriers to success and what it takes to fulfil their potential.
4. Leading on the development of students’ workplace skills through a mixture of in-school workshops delivered by a range of professionals as well as workplace visits and talks.

6. Identifying and recording the likely pathways for all students in Year 11, Year 12 and Year 13 after they finish their time at The Old School. This information is used to monitor the success of the Futures and UCAS programme and ensure that action is taken where need be. Data is collected from the students at Year 12 to identify their chosen pathways and to ensure that the necessary support is provided for them to reach their career goals.

7. Developing programmes to support students in being successful in securing high quality further education, training and employment.

8. Reviewing the quality and outcomes of all programmes to support students in being successful in securing high quality further education, training and employment.

Appendix E: The Futures programme review 2015-2016

Overview
The purpose of the Central Futures programme is to ensure that the successful progression of Central Foundation students into high quality further education, training or employment. This involves ensuring that leavers at KS5 move into a high quality university place, a high quality apprenticeship or meaningful employment with progression opportunities as well as ensuring that students leaving us at KS4 have a place on a course of their choice at a reputable sixth form education provider.

The purpose of this report is to analyse the destinations of the 2015-2016 cohort of students and assess how the current Central Futures programme has impacted these destinations. The report will also review the current programme, assess the quality and relevance of the programme as well as make recommendations to be implemented for 2016-2017.

The intended audience of this report is the Central Futures team, Senior Leadership Team and The Governing Body to give an overview of the work the Central Futures team has carried out in the period 2015-2016.
**Summary of KS5 Destinations**

The (Year 13) cohort for the academic year 2015-2016 consisted of 75 students, 37% of students were enrolled on vocational courses compared to 51% in the academic year 2014-2015, and the number of students who were enrolled on A level courses increased from 49% in 2014-2015 to 63%. This increase has been accredited to the achievement at GCSE, meaning more students have the entry requirements to progress to A-level courses.

Since 2013 we have seen a steady decrease in the number of students going to university with 76% of the cohort in 2015-2016 with confirmed places at university however, the number of students choosing to move into employment, apprenticeship or take a gap year has risen from 18% - 24%. 10 out of the 17 students choosing to follow an apprenticeship, employment or gap year route have secured positions. The 7 students who have not secured a position are receiving support from the school with 4 out of the 7 students attending weekly employability support sessions with….. (Co-ordinator). We are in regular contact with students and will continue to support them until they have all secured a position. We have built excellent KS5 communication channels and students who change course or employment route continue to keep us informed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination Summary</th>
<th>2015-16</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of students</td>
<td>% of cohort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total students</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of university places confirmed</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of students entering employment/ apprenticeship / Gap Year</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Number of students on roll in Year 13 at The Old School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F: Work experience review 2015-16

All year 12 students have the opportunity of applying for work experience positions organised with our partner businesses, a breakdown of the 2015/2016 placements can be found below. All opportunities are advertised in the Central Futures Bulletin and all students on programmes organised by the school go through a formal application process including submission of CV & covering letter followed by an interview with the employer. This process has been effective as it ensures that both the student and work experience host are fully engaged with the process. Where the employer does not have capacity to carry out interviews we have carried out the selection process within the Central Futures team. In an ever increasingly competitive job market we view the recruitment process is such as important as the work placement itself.

In 2015/2016 the percentage of Year 12 students completing a work experience placement organised by the school increased from 56% to 64% of the cohort.

Although we want to ensure that the recruitment process for work experience is as close to real life as possible we need to ensure that the most vulnerable students are accessing opportunities. In the academic year 2016/2017 we are trialling a long term placement with the BTEC Science students which will see them attend a placement one day a week from October half term until May half term. If this is successful it is something that we would consider rolling out with all of the vocational courses.
Appendix H: The annual Year 12 Futures workshop proposal 2016

**Aim:** To prepare students for Year 13 destination applications by equipping students to make
informed choices, and help them start the formal application processes and submit a Pre-Application.

**Objectives**

* All students to justify what attracts them to and what puts them off non-university route
* All students to justify what attracts them to and what puts them off university.
* All students to outline all available routes open to them.
* All students to become familiar with the resources for making selections, including unifrog, apprenticeship websites and prospectuses, and university websites.
* All students to select and justify eight realistic UCAS choices.
* All students to select and justify one potential non-university route.
* All students to identify skills and experiences strengths and deficits.
* All students to further develop employability skills.
* All students to weigh up the potential opportunities and risks of their current position, including their chance of success in their first choice destination and their chance of dropping out.
* All students to register for UCAS and non-university application services.

**Outcome**

To produce an excellent draft of a personal statement and CV that reflects choices, experiences, skills and qualifications that suit their choices.

**Monday: Post sixth form options**

Ex Student Talk.

Where next: Study abroad, Gap year, Leftfield courses, School leaver programmes, apprenticeships. Discussion with ex-students

**Tuesday: Choices and audit skills**

University panel discussion: Unifrog, UCL, Oxbridge, Non-London universities university application
**Wednesday: Employability skills**

Carousel of employers/volunteers, constructing a CV, cover letters, applications, interviews, networking, resilience for finding and keeping a job, selling yourself

**Thursday: Options and selection sign up**

Identify 8 realistic UCAS choices and one non-university route.

**Friday: Personal statements and job applications**

Drafting with volunteers

**Appendix J: Letters of introduction to the interviewees**

i. **Letter introducing research to Futures co-ordinator**

Dear ********

As the teacher-in-charge of Central Futures, I would like to interview you about the initiative’s purpose and impact on the sixth-form. This will contribute to the context of my research: ‘Student and staff perceptions and experiences of employability at an English school sixth form,’

Please let me know a convenient time for interview after school, over the next two weeks.

You can withdraw from the interview at any time. If wish, you can see a transcript of your interview and amend it. I appreciate your support in collecting data for this research.

................................................................................................................................................
................................................................................................................................................

Please complete and return the slip below and return it by email

I am willing to be interviewed / I am not willing to be interviewed

(Please delete as appropriate)  Signed: (please type name)................................

Regards   Ian Robinson

ii. **Letter introducing research to form tutors**

Dear Colleague
As a tutor of the 2014-15 Y12 cohorts of students, I would like to involve you in a three year piece of research which I am conducting for a Doctorate of Education through the Open University.

Employers remain concerned about the work readiness of school leavers. The research investigates the preparation of vocational students for the workplace by tutors addressing student social and cultural deficit.

I intend to interview each tutor. The purpose of the interviews is to discover a consensus of tutors towards the preparation of their students for the workplace. A sample of students will then be interviewed to discover their expectations of the workplace. The outcome is intended to a course which enables the transition from student to employee, delivered by tutors. The foundation of the course will be professional understanding of tutors rather than a body of information.

You will be able to leave the interview process at any time. If wish, you can see a transcript of your interview and amend it. I appreciate your support in collecting data for this research.

Please complete and return the slip below and return it to me:

I am willing to be interviewed / I am not willing to be interviewed
(Please delete as appropriate)
Signed: (please type name)..................................................................................

Regards
Ian Robinson

iii. Letter introducing students sample to the research

Dear ...............
I would like to involve you in a three year piece of research which I am conducting for a Doctorate of Education through the Open University. You have been chosen to represent the sixth-form intake to contribute to my research:

‘Student and staff perceptions and experiences of employability at an English school sixth form’

Employers remain concerned about the work readiness of students who enter the workplace for the first time. The research investigates the preparation of students for the entry to the workplace for the first time.

You will be interviewed in a gender group which follow either A-levels or BTEC courses of study. You will be able to leave the interview process at any time. If wish, you can see a transcript of your interview and amend it. I appreciate your support in collecting data for this research.

If you wish to take part in the research please complete the slip below and return it to the Head of Sixth form

I am willing to be interviewed / I am not willing to be interviewed
(Please delete as appropriate)

Signed: (please write your name in capital letters)

Regards

Mr. Robinson