Factors which impact on the concepts of professional learning and assessment in the Scottish Further Education context.

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Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD)

Submitted September 2023.
Abstract:

This research reports on qualitative research undertaken within the Further Education context in Scotland, and furthers our understanding of both professional learning for lecturers and the ways in which lecturers implement assessment processes and practices.

This research was conducted during a period when the importance of lecturers’ professional learning was increasingly being emphasised, in part due to changes which require FE lecturers to register with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). It answers the following research questions:

1: What factors have an impact on lecturers’ professional learning, in a further education (FE) learning context?

2: How do these factors impact on lecturers’ implementation and development of assessment practices, in an FE learning context?

3: To what extent can an action research methodology contribute to professional learning practices, in an FE learning context?

The study is based on two contributing methodologies: constructivist grounded theory (CGT) and participatory action research (PAR). The participatory ethos embedded within this research ensures that the findings reflect the perspectives and priorities of the research participants, who are lecturers working within one FE institution. This participatory ethos is complemented by the CGT approach to analysis. These methodologies result in findings which provide a timely insight into the factors which impact upon lecturers’ professional learning, from the perspectives of the participants themselves.

The findings identify factors within the micro, meso and macro levels which both support and hinder lecturers’ engagement with professional learning. Using Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015)’s concepts of communities and landscapes of practice, the findings also explore the ways in which messages at the macro level, combined with the specific context in which FE lecturers work, can restrict lecturers’ engagement with other professionals and impact upon lecturers’ assessment practices. Finally, the findings explore the ways in which action research structures can be used to support lecturers’ engagement with professional learning.
Dedication:

I dedicate this thesis to my husband, Steve, and my children, Finlay and Sam.

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to my supervisors, Dr Maria Fernandez-Toro and Dr Lore Gallastegi, for your support. I am grateful for your encouragement, your constructive and supportive feedback, and your willingness to accommodate my occasional tangents and diversions throughout this EdD study.

I would like to thank the participants who volunteered to take part in this research. I’m very grateful to you all for your time, your thoughts and your insights; I hope this written thesis is an appropriate reflection of the stories that you shared with me.

Thank you to Professor Morag Redford for your constructive comments on a draft of this thesis. Your feedback gave me the boost I needed to see this through to completion.

I’m not sure where I would be without the WhatsApp group of fellow EdD students. The practical advice that was shared was invaluable; the support, encouragement and photos of your dogs added colour to some otherwise bleak study days. Thank you to all of you.

To my extended family and friends, I am enormously grateful. This research has accompanied me – and, by extension, you – everywhere for the past four years. You’ve tolerated it as an extra guest in your homes; it has come with us to campsites, to the leisure centre, on paddleboards, on the phone, to the pub, on walks, in the snow, up hills, on bikes, in the sun. Thank you for your patience. (What am I going to talk about now?!) Thank you to Rebecca Ellerker for your encouragement in the final phases of this research. I am very grateful for your attention to detail and your willingness to discuss the nuances of a phrase or a word; I am grateful for your understanding throughout.

Finally, thank you to my husband, Steve, for your unending support. Thank you to my children, Finlay and Sam, for your patience (but no, a Doctorate in Education won’t mean I can tell your teachers what to do!). I’m grateful to the three of you for your belief in this research and in my ability to complete it.
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List of terms and acronyms

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<th>Action Research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CFE</td>
<td>Curriculum for Excellence</td>
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<tr>
<td>CGT</td>
<td>Constructivist Grounded Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoP</td>
<td>Community of Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIS</td>
<td>Educational Institute of Scotland</td>
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<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td>Education Scotland</td>
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<tr>
<td>EV</td>
<td>External Verifier (from awarding body)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FE</td>
<td>Further Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<td>GTCS</td>
<td>General Teaching Council for Scotland</td>
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<td>GTM</td>
<td>Grounded Theory Method</td>
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<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<td>LLS</td>
<td>Lifelong Learning Sector</td>
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<td>PAR</td>
<td>Participatory Action Research</td>
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<td>PD</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
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<td>PDA</td>
<td>Professional Development Award</td>
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<td>PL</td>
<td>Professional Learning</td>
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<td>PU</td>
<td>Professional Update</td>
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<td>SDS</td>
<td>Skills Development Scotland</td>
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<td>SoA</td>
<td>Statement of Ambition</td>
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<td>SCQF</td>
<td>Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework</td>
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<td>SQA</td>
<td>Scottish Qualifications Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>TQFE</td>
<td>Teaching Qualification in Further Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>VLE</td>
<td>Virtual Learning Environment</td>
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Preface

This thesis reports on qualitative research undertaken within the FE context in Scotland. A note of explanation is required regarding the structure of this thesis, due to the researcher’s understanding of research design, as articulated by Maxwell (2022, p. 6), that: “the activities of collecting and analysing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating or refocusing the research questions...are usually all going on more or less simultaneously, each influencing all of the others”. The researcher’s adherence to this idea means that the production of a straightforward narrative regarding the research process was a challenge.

This fundamental understanding of research design was compounded by the choice of methodologies which underpinned the research: constructivist grounded theory (CGT) and participatory action research (PAR). As will be discussed within chapter three, both methodologies are flexible and responsive (Dick, 2007) and allow the direction of the research to change depending on the data collected. This has implications for the structure of the written account of the research, especially in terms of a thesis; researchers are normally instructed to aim for a “single, coherent narrative” (Open University, 2023, p. 1). As other grounded theory researchers have found (e.g. Straughair, 2019), the coherence of a thesis formed on these methodologies can be a challenge.

Charmaz (2006, p. 166) offers advice to such researchers, given that the flexible nature of a CGT methodology may have caused them to travel “to new substantive terrain”, including scaling “unimaginable theoretical heights”. Addressing the researchers directly, she suggests that, although grounded theory researchers should “satisfy your teachers by outlining your path”, they should “first attend to writing your grounded theory”. Here, Charmaz implies that the parts of the thesis which relate to ‘outlining your path’ – i.e. the introductory chapter, methodology and literature review – can be viewed, and written, separately to the findings and discussion chapters which focus on the grounded theory itself.

With thanks to the viva examiners who endorsed a restructuring of this thesis to better reflect the complexities of research such as this, the structure of this thesis reflects Charmaz’s advice. Part A provides a detailed account of the ways in which the research design was constructed, acknowledging that the components cannot be viewed as discrete steps in the research but, instead, must be seen as “interacting with one another” (Maxwell, 2022, p. 5). This first part of the thesis (found in chapters one to four) is a reflexive, generally chronological depiction of the construction of the research design. It includes consideration of the positionality of the researcher, the development of the underlying conceptual framework, and how these changed as the research progressed. Part B includes the findings, discussion and conclusions reached from this research. More academic in tone, this second part (chapters five to seven) aims to satisfy the requirements of a Professional Doctorate in terms of the contribution to knowledge and to practice. The intention is that the two parts of this written thesis can be read almost independently: those interested in the research process, and issues to do with reflexivity, ethics and positionality within a participatory or grounded theory methodology, will find Part A most interesting. Those interested in concepts of professional learning, assessment and the FE context, and those wishing to read the practical recommendations emanating from the research process, will find what they require within Part B.
Part A

Chapter one: Introduction

This study reports on qualitative research undertaken within the Further Education (FE) context in Scotland. In this introductory chapter, information will be presented about the meso-level context of this research, due to Stutchbury and Fox (2009, p. 494)’s assertion that an understanding of the “norms, roles and values” of the institution is required in order to ensure “cultural sensitivity within research”. The aim of section 1.1 is to present sufficient context to allow for this understanding.

Next, in order to avoid this research being “under-conceptualised and methodologically hazy” (Ravitch and Riggan, 2016, p. 3), this chapter will respond to Ravitch and Riggan’s request that researchers provide “a systematic way of thinking through and articulating what you plan to study and how you plan to study it”. Section 1.2 will provide this systematic articulation, using Ravitch and Riggan (2016)’s articulation of a conceptual framework, as shown in figure 1.1, as a structure.

1.1 The research context

This research is set within a geographically dispersed institution in Scotland, which delivers both Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) qualifications. In order to understand the research context in which this study is set, several features of this institution require explanation.

1.1.1 A Further Education (FE) institution

The term ‘further education’ (FE) most commonly refers to an institution which receives government funding to provide education and training to people over the age of 16 (Education and Training Foundation, 2020, p. 7). An FE institution may offer vocational and academic courses, as well as offering higher education (HE) and adult or community learning classes (Education and Training Foundation, 2020, p. 8). In some contexts, the term ‘post-compulsory’ may also be used. Given the range of qualifications delivered within the sector, the term ‘college sector’ is also frequently used.

In Scotland, the college sector cannot be split definitively from stages of education which are compulsory, due to the fact that the national curriculum – the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)– is intended as “a coherent curriculum from 3 to 18” (Hayward, 2015, p. 31). The senior phase of the CfE is defined by age, not learning context; given that a significant proportion of learners studying within the college sector are under the age of 18 (Education Scotland, 2014), the CfE is a policy document which is relevant to institutions within the secondary and college sectors alike. An understanding of the CfE is therefore required in order to fully understand the context in which this research is set, despite the fact that it does not apply to all learners within this context.

College institutions are also required to meet expectations outlined within the Statement of Ambition (SoA). This government document outlines the vision for Scotland’s college sector, with a view to being a “driver for positive change in the college sector” (Colleges Scotland, 2018, p. 4). Dominant discourses within this SoA relate to the career prospects of learners and the economic prospects of Scotland, as well as the educational and skills gains made by learners during their time within the college institution.

There are therefore multiple discourses with which institutions, lecturers and learners in the college sector must engage. This section has drawn upon definitions and explanations produced by a number of different agencies and bodies, including Colleges Scotland; Education Scotland; the Scottish Government; the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). These different organisations,
which all contribute to the ways in which learning and teaching within the FE sector is organised, suggest that the FE context in Scotland can be viewed in terms of Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015, p. 15)’s “complex landscape of different communities of practice”, which will be explored in more detail within section 4.1.2. Furthermore, we can suggest that this causes specific complexities for lecturers within the college sector in Scotland, as they try to stay relevant to multiple discourses and to guidelines and requirements from multiple bodies. The multiplicity within the college sector means that the language and terminology used to explain a given concept may differ between the multiple bodies.

1.1.2 The research institution
Due to the dispersed geography of the institution, video conferencing software has traditionally been used to connect learners and lecturers who may work from any one of the numerous learning centres. In this respect, the learning context could be described as ‘blended’ learning, in that it incorporates some features of a ‘face to face’ classroom experience with an online learning experience, in which use of technology features highly and students do not necessarily have true face-to-face contact with their tutors or other learners. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, and its subsequent disruption to educational institutions from 2020, this method of delivery had been relatively unfamiliar within many educational contexts, but was an established mechanism for delivery within the research institution.

The localities of the learning centres which make up this institution are spread across a large geographic area and vary considerably in size. Some centres have small, rural populations; others are situated in more populated areas. This variation results in what has been described as “the most challenging geography for service delivery in Scotland” (DTZ Consulting and Research, 2007). Furthermore, lecturers and learners may work from any one of the local learning centres. As such, the sense of community or isolation felt by individuals will vary. Drawing parallels with case study research done into communities of practice in the National Health Service Scotland (Pyrko et al., 2016), it could be suggested that the fragmented geography may result in reduced capacity for the members of this institution to “think together” (p. 403), due to fewer opportunities for informal, immediate conversation between lecturers and between lecturers and learners.

The last factor to be stated here relates to the institution’s delivery of both FE and HE programmes. Within this institution, HE qualifications are awarded by one body; FE qualifications are awarded by others. Subsequently, the policies relating to FE and HE activities are different, given that they are required to reflect different regulatory requirements. As noted within Wilson (2017), this results in “a different set of stakeholders, enterprises and practice for FE and HE activities”. It is common within the research institution for lecturers to deliver both FE and HE qualifications; the requirements of lecturers may therefore vary throughout their working day, depending on the qualification that they are delivering at a given time.

1.2 Building my conceptual framework.
Using figure 1.1 as the basis for their articulation, Ravitch and Riggan (2016, p. 9) underline the importance of articulating the researcher’s “personal interests and goals”, and “identity and positionality” in order to establish a “starting point” for the research process. The following sections will articulate these ideas. Given the personal nature of this conceptual framework, the first person narrative will be used throughout.
1.2.1 Personal interest and goals
This research started with a focus on lecturers’ assessment practices, which stemmed from my previous work into the changing discourses surrounding assessment, as will be explored within chapter two. My understanding of the changing discourses related to assessment was compounded by my understanding that the Scottish FE context was in a period of fluidity more generally. Chapter two will explore this period of fluidity in more detail; at this stage, it is sufficient to highlight that, during the period in which the research was being conceived, there were changing requirements for FE lecturers in Scotland in terms of their registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). These changes related primarily to the Professional Learning (PL) of lecturers.

A belief that led to this research project was that the voices of lecturers were not being heard within this period of fluidity, either with reference to assessment discourses or to the changing requirements of lecturers within the FE context. My goal, therefore, was to embark on research which would explore and explain the perceptions of FE lecturers within this period of fluidity, and my focus was on lecturers’ assessment practices.

1.2.2 Identity and positionality
My decision to embark on educational research, located as it is within the social sciences, shows my interest in “aspects that are unique, individual and qualitative” (Crotty, 1998, p. 68). This interest locates this research within the qualitative paradigm and suggests an interpretivist perspective, which recognises that “there are multiple perspectives on a particular issue” (Johnson, 2017, p. 3), and seeks “to identify the local meanings and particulars of a given phenomenon” (Johnson, 2017, p. 3). The aim was not to uncover a “universal truth” (Schweisfurth and Elliott, 2019, p. 6) but a “rich and contextually situated understanding” (McChesney and Aldridge, 2019, p. 227) of the practices of lecturers within the FE context in Scotland.
My underlying ontological understanding includes that realities are “social constructions” (Lincoln and Guba, 1989, p. 230) and that research aims to uncover “the various constructions held by individuals and often shared among members of ... professionally similar groups in some social context” (Lincoln and Guba, 1989, p. 230). Knowledge, from this ontological perspective, is considered as multiple, and is considered to be “constructed, reconstructed, negotiated and renegotiated in and through meaning” (McLaughlin, 2012, p. 30).

My epistemological understanding of knowledge is that it is “never static or contained” (Noy, 2008, p. 331), but is instead “socially and culturally produced” (Clarke et al., 2018, p. 10). These ontological and epistemological understandings align with a constructionist paradigm, as articulated by Crotty (1998, p. 42) – “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality...is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context”.

Researchers “inevitably...bring(s) a number of assumptions to our chosen methodology. We need, as best we can, to state what these assumptions are” (Crotty, 1998, p.7). It is useful here to offer an understanding of my axiology, or values, which can provide “an important basis for making explicit the assumptions of different paradigms of research” (Given, 2008, p. 2). I have embarked on this research as part of a Professional Doctorate, which aims to “equip practitioners...to become champions of change within their areas of professional practice” (Open Learn, 2020). There are two aspects of this aim which require consideration: my understanding of ‘practice’ itself, and the reference to ‘champions of change’.

Grootenboer and Edwards-Groves (2023, p. vi) explain how the “ubiquity of the word ‘practice’...has raised the need for us to put the spotlight on practice itself”. Ronnerman and Kemmis (2016, p. 95) define practice as “a form of socially established cooperative human activity involving characteristic forms of understanding (saying), modes of action (doings) and ways in which people relate to each other (relatings). These sayings, doings and relatings are enabled and constrained by “practice architectures”, which are the “conditions that influence, shape, organise, and so arrange how practices get done” (Grootenboer and Edwards-Groves, 2023, p. 10). This facilitating function of practice architectures require us to focus “not in the abstract or in general, but [on] the particular kinds of arrangements that are present in or brought to a particular site” (Ronnerman and Kemmis, 2016, p. 95), as well as on the sayings, doings and relatings of individual practitioners. This understanding of ‘practice’ is appropriate to this research project, which will focus on the “particular site” (Ronnerman and Kemmis, 2016, p. 95) articulated in section 1.1.2. Within this thesis, the word ‘practice’ therefore refers to the ways in which individual practitioners speak about, and during, their professional activities; it refers to the activities in which they engage; it refers to the ways in which practitioners engage with each other, with their learners and with their environment. However, these things are not viewed as entirely under the control of the practitioners themselves; this view of practice recognises the impact of the conditions in which practitioners operate on these sayings, doings and relatings.

My decision to engage in this Professional Doctorate programme suggests that the belief that practitioners can become “champions of change” is embedded within my belief system. This belief aligns with and is fuelled by the professional context in which I work. The GTCS requires teaching practitioners to demonstrate engagement with a framework of ‘standards’ as part of a process of PL. Within these standards, there is an expectation that all teachers engage in ‘enquiry’ within their professional practice (e.g. GTCS, 2020, p. 6). As a registered teaching practitioner within this system, I recognise that the value I place on knowledge created by practitioners within the field is affected by the emphasis placed on practitioner research by the GTCS, and my belief that change is possible.
My belief in the value of knowledge created by practitioners within the field, and in a practitioner’s capacity to implement change, aligns with the interpretivist theoretical perspective mentioned within the start of this section. As outlined by Johnson (2017, p. 3), research framed within an interpretivist theoretical perspective “draws...from critical and activist research paradigms”, in that it aims to “produce some solutions and responses that are meaningful to the community”.

As well as a belief in the value of knowledge created by practitioners, I also understand knowledge to be “limited to those whose voice is present” (Stieglitz and Levitan, 2020). In their exploration of the impact of Covid-19 on those studying within the FE sector, Spours et al. (2022, p. 783) suggest that there is “likely to be less relevant systematic review evidence available in further education compared with other education sectors”; drawing on Exley (2021) they suggest this is due to the “relatively under researched nature of Further Education”(p. 783). Linking this to my belief that the voices of practitioners within FE are not often heard, Lloyd and Jones (2018, p. 75) reflect on the fact that “in comparison with Higher Education (HE) where one of the key features is the development of new knowledge via research, the focus in FE in on teaching and learning”. They suggest that this results in less research being conducted in FE, because such research would be “undertaken in the individual’s own time”. Indeed, a database search of ‘Education Research Complete’ with keywords ‘further education’ and ‘post-compulsory education’, limited to research produced within the UK, from January 2014 to January 2024, results in 3,114 entries. In comparison, using the same date and geographical limits, and with keywords ‘higher education’ and ‘university’ results in 71,542 results; the keyword ‘school’, with the same limits and in the same database, results in 47,527 results. Chowdry (2014, p. 554) is therefore somewhat justified in describing the “voice of lecturers” as “absent from the literature”, at least in comparison to teaching practitioners in compulsory or higher educational contexts, where the number of research articles available in the compulsory school and higher educational contexts is approximately fifteen and twenty times higher respectively.

Finally, as a lecturer at the institution at which this research has been conducted, I have needed to acknowledge my position as an insider-researcher. The implications of this insider-researcher position are explored in further detail within section 3.4.2.

1.3 Conclusion: the starting point for this research

Crotty (1998) suggests that the provision of the researcher’s theoretical perspective “provides a context for the [research] process...and a basis for its logic and its criteria”.

Figure 1.2 shows how the ideas articulated above contributed to the ‘starting point’ for this research. As indicated within figure 1.2, the articulation of these areas provided me with a clear foundation on which to base my decisions about the methodology. I needed to select methodologies which allowed recognition of multiplicity, and research approaches which allowed both an exploration and explanation of a situation. Furthermore, I wanted to find approaches which would allow voices of practitioners to be heard.
Figure 1.2 Constructing my conceptual framework - stage 1. Adapted from Ravitch and Riggan (2016).
These ideas led to the adoption of a pluralistic methodological approach, made up of constructivist grounded theory (CGT) and participatory action research (PAR). The choice of CGT influenced the shaping of the literature review, which was conducted in two phases. An “initial phase literature review” (Straughair, 2019, p. 5) was conducted in line with the researcher’s personal interests, understanding of the ‘problem’ to be explored (assessment) and understanding of the FE context as in a period of fluidity. This initial literature review can be found in chapter two of this thesis. The data collection and analysis period was then started; chapter three explains the choice of methodologies and the data collection and analysis methods which were employed. In line with CGT approaches to research, this was followed by a “focused phase literature review” (Straughair, 2019, p. 3), in which “unpredicted concepts that have emerged from data analysis” (Straughair, 2019, p. 3) were explored, including the concept of Professional Learning and Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015)’s social theory of learning. This second, more focused literature review can be found within chapter four of this thesis.
Chapter two: The initial phase literature review

This chapter explores the literature relating to the researcher’s two initial areas of interest: the period of fluidity within the Scottish FE context, and the concept of ‘assessment’ as relevant to the FE context. In order to provide a coherent narrative, when discussing the time of fluidity within the educational context, this chapter will also include relevant issues that occurred within the data collection and analysis period which contributed to these feelings of fluidity, such as the changes caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.1 A time of fluidity within the educational context. In 2018, Husband (2018, p. 161) asserted that lecturers in the Scottish and Welsh FE sectors were required to work within an “unsettled and change-driven environment of merger and shifting policy context”. Two years later, at the time at which this research was being conducted, the environment in which this research is set could be described as significantly more unsettled for three main reasons: the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic; changes within the Scottish educational context generally; changing expectations of lecturers within the Scottish FE sector. Within section 2.1, these ideas will be explored in further depth.

2.1.1 The Covid-19 pandemic

Arguably the most visible factor affecting the research context at the time at which this research was conducted was the Covid-19 virus, which was declared a ‘pandemic’ by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in March 2020 (World Health Organisation, 2023). This coincided with the data collection period of this research, and had a significant immediate impact on education systems globally. As noted within Wilson (2023), the Covid-19 pandemic “forced a massive shift away from learning and teaching in traditional settings” (Unesco, 2020, p. 7); in the midst of the pandemic, there was a shift to “emergency remote education” (Bashir et al., 2021, p.2) of which “teaching institutions and practitioners should be proud” (Wilson, 2023, p. 31).

The impact of this on institutions and teaching practitioners was widespread; a detailed exploration of it is beyond the scope of this discussion. However, it is worth noting briefly the “abrupt” (Colville et al., 2021) changes to delivery mechanisms – for example, in Scotland, where the Scottish Government confirmed that “teaching, learning and support...would continue but in a different way, with teachers mostly connecting with pupils through distance and online learning” (Colville et al., 2021). These delivery mechanisms required institutions – and therefore teaching practitioners – to adapt their teaching approaches, including “making more use of digital tools” (Education Scotland, 2022). Furthermore, there was a significant impact on assessment systems. Howard et al. (2021) suggest that “some schools deprioritised learning that was not linked to assessments”. Assessment systems were adapted in terms of “changes to the syllabus or scope of the exams” (SQA, 2022, p. 4); other countries cancelled exams and used “alternative means of assessment” (SQA, 2022, p. 4). Although much of the teaching at the institution at which this research was set was done through blended delivery mechanisms prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, as articulated within section 1.1.2, the move to fully online, and the changes to assessment systems, was a considerable change for lecturers and learners within the research institution.

It is also worth noting that the impact of Covid-19 on education systems was not limited to the duration of the lockdowns or their immediate aftermath. Following the pandemic, UNESCO assert that “we can expect to increasingly have hybrid forms of teaching and learning...inside and outside the school, at different times...using a multiplicity of means and methods” (UNESCO, 2020, p.15). Furthermore, UNESCO (2020, p. 5) assert that “we must encourage conditions that give frontline
educators autonomy and flexibility to act collaboratively”, to allow educators to continue the “remarkable innovation” shown within the first stages of the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.1.2 Disruptions within the Scottish educational context
The Scottish educational context is also undergoing its own period of flux and potential disruption. The cancellation of examinations in summer 2020 due to Covid-19 resulted in “controversies and considerable media attention, centred around issues of equity” (Priestley et al., 2020, p.6), which prompted a rapid review to be conducted in September 2020. Within this review, Priestley et al. (2020, p. 44) found “consistent support from all stakeholders...for a reduced emphasis on terminal examinations as the basis for qualifications”. Following this, in June 2021, the Scottish Government commissioned an independent review to explore “recommendations for structural and functional change of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) [the main awarding body in Scotland] and Education Scotland (ES)” (Muir, 2022, p. 1).

As part of the Muir report, a national consultation was launched, which sought “opinions and ideas” about “the replacement of the SQA...the possible creation of a single specialist agency for curriculum and assessment...plans to substantially reform ES” (Scottish Government, 2021a). The publication of the Muir report then prompted an independent review of qualifications and assessment, whose aim was to “ensure that all senior phase learners have an enhanced and equal opportunity to demonstrate the width, depth and relevance of their learning” (Scottish Government, 2021b). The final report from this independent review was published in June 2023, determining that there was “a convincing case to change the current system of qualifications and assessment in Scotland” (Scottish Government, 2023, p.22). Recommendations from this report related to multiple and far-reaching areas of Scottish education, including recommendations that the Scottish education system should “broaden the range of assessment methods” (p. 66); facilitate a “broader range of achievements” (p. 61); “model cultural change” (p. 94); change the “vision and principles... into both policy and practice” (p. 100). There were also implications for the professional learning of educators within the Scottish context, with broad references to “professional learning that brings together curriculum design, learning, teaching, assessments and qualifications” (p. 91) and specific references to professional learning “about bias” (p. 41), which “should be an essential component” (p. 41) accessible to educators. Throughout the report, there are references to the need for a “new approach” (p. 14) and references to the education system as needing to “evolve” (p. 13).

Added to UNESCO (2020, p.5)’s expectation, then, that teaching practitioners continue to innovate with a “multiplicity” of delivery “means and methods” is that, for teaching practitioners in Scotland, there are also changes expected within the curriculum and the means by which they assess their learners.

2.1.3 Expectations of lecturers within the Scottish FE sector
The FE sector in Scotland can also be described as undergoing a period of fluidity. First of all, it is important to note that the national consultations and reviews discussed above are relevant to the FE sector, given its role in providing educational opportunities linked to the ‘senior phrase’ of the Scottish curriculum (see section 1.1.1). In addition, the expectations of lecturers within the FE context have been changing: a “longstanding policy” (EIS, 2019) of the trade union Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) regarding the mandatory registration of college lecturers with the GTCS was agreed in 2017 (EIS, 2019), and the “national programme of registration is underway” (GTCS, no date-a). In September 2021, the “first tranche of mandatory registration” (EIS, 2019) started, for those lecturers who hold the required qualifications. Until February 2023, all lecturers within the FE sector were under the impression that they would be required to work towards full registration as
soon as possible. However, in February 2023, following further consultation, the GTCS approved a set of professional standards called the ‘Standard for Provisional (Conditional) Registration’, which provides “a new transitional route to registration for a defined group of college lecturers” (Colleges Scotland, 2023), which was a further change to the context in which lecturers work. This “new transitional route” towards full registration is “ringfenced and time limited” (GTCS, 2023) requiring lecturers to gain full registration within five years.

This contractual requirement changes expectations of lecturers in two significant ways. Firstly, full GTCS registration is only open to lecturers who hold a Teaching Qualification in Further Education (TQFE) or recognised equivalent primary/secondary teaching qualification. As well as the requirement to gain this qualification, some lecturers may first be required to complete pre-requisite qualifications such as the PDA Teaching Practice in Scotland’s Colleges qualification, an SCQF level 9 course targeted at relatively new lecturers. Furthermore, once registered, lecturers are required to demonstrate their ongoing PL and their engagement with the GTCS Professional Standards for Lecturers in Scotland’s Colleges through a process called Professional Update (PU). Lecturers are required to maintain a record of their PL which must be confirmed every five years (GTCS-b, no date.). The requirement for lecturers to demonstrate their engagement with PL activities is a significant change for lecturers within the Scottish FE sector.

2.1.4 Summary: a time of fluidity

It should be noted that all three factors referred to in section 2.1 are characterised by uncertainty. For the duration of this research, which was started in 2018, there has been uncertainty regarding the qualifications required for registration with the GTCS, and when these requirements will come into force; in 2023 the registration rules were changed again to include the “transitional route” (GTCS, 2023) referred to in section 2.1.3. There has been uncertainty regarding the outcome of the national consultations into the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) (see section 2.1.2) and uncertainty regarding the curriculum structure of the senior phrase of the Scottish curriculum. The Covid-19 pandemic itself was a period of “unexpected turmoil” (Gilead and Dishon, 2021, p. 822).

Teaching practitioners have been required to continue their professional practice throughout this period of fluidity and uncertainty, requiring them to innovate within their professional practice (Nguyen et al., 2021). Recent literature (e.g. Nguyen et al. (2021); Lu and Campbell (2021)) exploring teaching practitioners’ capacity to innovate highlights teacher PL as a significant influencing factor. Within their discussion of the “continuously evolving environments caused by global and societal changes” within which teaching practitioners work, Tarnanen et al. (2021, p. 2) suggest that teachers “are expected to engage” in PL activities, in order to be able to respond to the changing context around them. Nguyen et al. (2021) assert that the process of participating in PL influences teaching practitioners’ attitudes towards innovative change (2021, p. 2); Lu and Campbell (2021, p. 68) also suggest that there are multiple reasons to suggest that “professional learning enables teacher innovation”.

The literature also emphasises the relevance of professional identity when considering the impact of a changing educational context: Tarnanen et al. (2021, p. 2) suggest that “local changes – such as curriculum reforms and changes to school communities – might challenge teachers’ profession and mindset”; Lu and Campbell (2021, p. 68) emphasise the need for a “strong learning orientation, as opposed to performance orientation” within teaching communities that wish to innovate. The following section will explore the literature relating to the researcher’s starting point – assessment – and will explore links between assessment and this concept of professional identity.
2.2 Assessment.

Assessment, according to Price et al. (2012, p. 11), “lies at the centre of the student experience” and is a “dominant influence on student learning”. The importance of assessment as a part of learning is emphasised elsewhere within the literature: Davies and Taras (2018, p. 475) assert that “assessment is linked directly to issues of justice, which is why it needs to be justified, explicit and challengeable”. It is unsurprising, therefore, that there is a considerable focus on assessment and feedback within the research literature, including a focus on assessment theories (e.g. Taras, 2012) and practices (e.g. Handley et al., 2012); insight into learners’ feedback preferences (Carless and Boud, 2018; Hill and West, 2020; Krijgsman et al., 2019); and more.

However, it should be noted that the terms ‘assessment’ and ‘feedback’ are used in different ways by researchers. There is “more than one idea of feedback struggling for wider acceptance” (Boud and Molloy, 2013, p. 700): feedback may be discussed in relation to summative or formative opportunities, and in relation to written or spoken forms. Furthermore, the purpose of feedback differs between and within these terms. Feedback may be designed to close the gap between what is known and what needs to be known (Sadler, 1989, cited in Dann, 2019); it may be conceptualised more broadly as “a ‘consequence’ of performance” (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p. 81). As summarised by Price et al. (2011a, p. 882), the fact that ‘feedback’ as a concept encompasses such a variety of definition leads to “a multiplicity of expectations among both staff and students of what feedback can and will provide”.

Similarly, Davies and Taras (2018, p. 486) describe the “divergent and distinct” meanings of the term ‘assessment’; Price et al. (2012, p. 9) explain how definitions can be “broader or narrower, depending on people’s interpretation of them”. However, despite this multiplicity, the importance of the concept of ‘assessment’ is clearly articulated within the literature - O’Donovan (2019, p. 1581) defines it as the “key driver” of student learning which can “powerfully influence” students’ “approaches and behaviours”; Taras (2012, p. 5) asserts that it is “crucial to all education and to all learning”.

Assessment can be broadly categorised as ‘summative’ or ‘formative’. However, these terms are also “open to a variety of interpretations” (Broadfoot et al., 1999, p. 7) and used in multiple ways; the term formative “often means no more than that assessment is carried out frequently and is planned at the same time as teaching” (Broadfoot et al., 1999, p. 7). Within the Scottish context, these terms are not used to describe a particular type of assessment but are used to “describe how assessments are used” (Scottish Government, 2011, p. 23). Assessments can be used formatively “to inform planning for improvements in learning” (Scottish Government, 2011, p. 23); summative use of an assessment describes “‘stepping back’ to take stock of learners’ progress and achievements” (Scottish Government, 2011, p. 23).

This brief summary of the literature relating to assessment and feedback highlights the variation in discourses around assessment and feedback. However, given this variation, it is important to clarify how the terms are used within the literature review. This literature review will follow Price et al. (2012, p. 9)’s lead in using the term ‘assessment’ to refer to all aspects of the process through which staff “evaluate the quality of the work submitted and make suggestions for improvement”. References to ‘assessment’, therefore, may also refer to ‘feedback’; we are interested in all aspects of the assessment and feedback process.
2.2.1 Learning-focused assessment practices

One significant approach to assessment within the literature is a view of assessment which focuses on ‘learning focused’ practices, as opposed to ‘transmission focused’ practices. This difference, characterised by Winstone and Carless (2020, p. 9) as “new” and “old” paradigms respectively, encourages lecturers, institutions and learners to move away from perceptions of assessment as something produced or done by a teacher – i.e. ‘old paradigm’ – to “a process where students are proactive in seeking, making use of and using comments” (Winstone and Carless, 2020, p. 6) about their work.

As suggested within its name, this approach to assessment embeds assessment into the learning process. It requires a shift away from the perception found within much of the literature (e.g. Esterhazy, 2018; Price et al., 2011a) that feedback can be “easily...‘added’ to any course design” (Esterhazy, 2018, p. 1303). Instead, lecturers need to deliver a curriculum which incorporates a “cyclic and iterative approach to dialogic feed-forward” (Hill and West, 2020, p. 92), allowing opportunities for self-assessment by the student. The focus here is on supporting students’ “longitudinal development” (Hill and West, 2020, p. 92), not on feedback as a response to a singular task, testing a singular skill or element of knowledge. Drawing upon literature from the past decade, Hill and West suggest that feedback processes should be built up from one assessment opportunity that is clearly linked to future assignments. They suggest that this process incorporates elements of an “ideal learning environment”.

2.2.1.1 Examples of ‘learning focused’ assessment practices

The literature outlines many examples of how learning-focused assessment practices can be incorporated into the assessment processes of a course or module. For example:

- Holmes (2018) incorporated a “weekly low-stakes online test” into the VLE of an undergraduate geography module. In doing so, students received immediate feedback on their progress, which increased their capacity for self-direction, in that they could “make sure I actually...understand what was taught each week” (p. 31).

- Bloxham and Campbell (2010) explored the use of assessment cover sheets which are “designed to shift the balance of responsibility in assessment” (p. 292). Students used the cover sheets to identify the areas of their assessment on which they would like feedback; in this way, learners moved from occupying a “passive and powerless role” to adopting a role in which they had responsibility for communication with their assessor, thereby aligning with learning focused practices.

- Audio and video technologies can “place emphasis...on what students do with feedback” (Winstone and Carless, 2020, p. 61) which clearly aligns with the learning focused approach to assessment outlined within this section. Examples include Fernandez-Toro and Furnborough (2014), in which students’ reactions to their tutors’ feedback were recorded “as a means of promoting effective learning dialogue” (p. 46), and Munro and Hollingsworth (2014). In the Munro and Hollingsworth study, student perceptions of both audio and written feedback were compared; conclusions suggest that audio feedback “reinforced the students’ cognitive understanding of their feedback” (2014, p. 871), increasing the extent to which students could reflect and self-assess accurately.

A detailed exploration of these studies is not possible, nor necessary, within this review. Instead, they are mentioned to highlight the variety of ways in which learning-focused practices can be incorporated into practice. This variety should not be viewed as detrimental to our understanding of learning-focused feedback practices – instead, it can be suggested that this multiplicity of practices
serves to highlight the importance of considering the specific context in which the learning takes place. This aligns with the social constructionist view taken within this research of assessment processes being “historically and culturally specific” (Burr, 2015, p. 15). Furthermore, given the absence of research set within an FE context within the literature, this emphasis on context serves to further justify the FE focus of this research project.

2.2.2 Influences on the assessment process

Within this ‘learning-focused’ view of assessment, it is clear that both students and teaching practitioners have an important role to play. However, Winstone and Carless (2020, p. 2) also emphasise the influence of “external influences such as regulations and the curriculum”, as well as the “context of a learning process”, including “the requirements of departmental or institutional guidelines or regulations, or the requirements of Professional or Accrediting Bodies”. It is therefore important to consider the literature relating to these ‘external influences’.

2.2.2.1 Subject / discipline influences on assessment

One key theme emerging from the literature regarding assessment is the idea of dissonance between practices due to the subject or discipline being taught. The literature suggests that an individual lecturer’s understanding of assessment is strongly influenced by their subject or discipline. Building on previous research published by Taras (2012), Davies and Taras (2018, p. 475) assert that lecturers need an “understanding of epistemologies, concepts and practices” relating to the specific contexts in which the assessment is situated. Shay (2008, p. 537) asserts that “academic assessment practices only make sense within the logic of the field of academe”. We see assessment, therefore, as varying depending on the subject matter being taught. This may be particularly true of “pedagogy informed assessment practices” – those associated with learning-focused practices – which are often “rooted deeply in established disciplinary epistemologies” (Moore, 2000, p. 197).

2.2.2.2 Institutional influences on assessment

The literature suggests that institutional policies can be a source of tension for lecturers. Tuck (2012) used data from six diverse universities in the UK to assert that institutional policies regarding feedback can result in a tension between the institutional requirement to assess students – that is, to allocate a mark to learners – and a teacher’s capacity to mark and provide feedback which can help learners progress (p. 214). The fact that “feedback is not exclusively for the student” (p. 215) may reduce teachers’ willingness to address the student through feedback, due to the “conflicting relationships of both pedagogy … and accountability” (p. 215). Institutional policies, according to Tuck, “may reduce teachers’ potential sense of pedagogic connection” (2012, p. 214) between teachers and learners; teachers’ decisions about their feedback “appear to be more strongly shaped by institutional pressures than driven by individual judgements about what would be most helpful to students’ learning” (p. 213).

Similar ideas can be found elsewhere within the literature. Price et al. (2012, p. 13) suggest that institutional policies often focus on the “mechanics” of assessment. Crook et al. (2006, p. 97) describe a “trend” in institutional thinking about assessment as focusing on “accountability”, which leads to a “preoccupation with ‘process’”. These ideas suggest that institutional “pressure” (Tuck, 2012, p. 214) is not necessarily based on pedagogy, and suggest that institutional policies may not align with the learning-focused approach to assessment which is currently prevalent within the literature.

2.2.2.3 Scotland-specific influences on assessment

The senior phase of the Curriculum for Excellence, which is taught within the compulsory sector and the FE sector, includes both “external examinations and internal assessment by teachers” (McVittie,
That the internal assessments are usually designed on a pass/fail basis, in which "students are required to demonstrate minimum competence" (McVittie, 2008, p. 5) is noteworthy: the senior phase of the CfE has traditionally centred around a modularised curriculum of units, which can be suggested to fragment or trivialise learning (p. 15), and which can be seen to reward an approach which settles for the minimum required. Such an approach also reduces the extent to which lecturers can motivate learners to “take up and use feedback to improve their subsequent work” (Molloy et al., 2020, p. 528). Drawing on “decades” of international research, Burleigh and Meegan (2018, p. 324) suggest that “individuals will adapt to the ‘goal structure’ of the classroom and therefore adopt a goal orientation that mirrors how success is defined”. It can therefore be suggested that the CfE at senior phase discourages lecturers from designing assessments within a learning-focused approach.

2.2.2.4 FE-specific influences on assessment.

Carless and Winstone state that the identity of the teacher is “likely to play a role in relation to feedback literacy” (2020, p. 7). Within section 4.2, further consideration will be given to the idea of professional identity for lecturers within the FE context; here it is sufficient to assert that a lecturer whose identity is centred on their subject, not their role as a ‘teacher’, will place less emphasis on their professional development as an educator. Willis et al. (2013, p. 242) argue that a lecturer’s understanding of assessment “needs to be positioned within a discussion about learning theory” – a discussion which, for lecturers who do not hold a strong teaching identity, may not be of interest. Within section 4.2, it will be argued that the professional identity of lecturers within the FE context is less clearly defined than the professional identity for those working with the compulsory education contexts; this lack of definition may therefore be a further problematic influence on assessment practices within the FE context.

FE learning contexts bring further barriers to lecturers’ assessment literacy. Price et al. (2012) suggest that teaching practitioners’ understanding of assessment is developed gradually over a period of time. Data relating to employment in the further education sector in England defines 34% of teaching staff as being on “precarious contracts” (UCU, 2016, p. 1). The “notoriously poor workforce data” (UCU, 2016, p. 2) for which the FE sector is known means that concrete current information is difficult to locate. However, the “short duration” contracts which result in staff “worrying about and looking for their next contract” (UCU, 2016, p. 2) mean that lecturers within the FE context do not necessarily have the time to develop their understanding of assessment processes and practices.

2.2.3 Summary: influences on the assessment process.

Davies and Tara (2018, p. 475) suggest that there needs to be a “shared understanding between all the protagonists involved” in the assessment process. This brief review of the literature suggests that such a shared understanding is not likely for those involved in the Scottish FE context.

Section 2.2 outlines the different definitions of assessment and feedback within the literature, and focuses on the ‘learning-focused’ approach to assessment that can be found within current literature. It is therefore necessary at this point to define how the terms ‘assessment’ and ‘learning’ are used within this thesis, to avoid conflating the two concepts.

The term ‘assessment’ is used as in Black and William (1998, p. 7)’s definition: “all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities”. More specifically, the term ‘formative assessment’ is used within this thesis to mean when assessment “evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet the student needs” (Black et al., 2004, p. 10).
Black and William (1998)’s definition of assessment leads us to a consideration of the terms ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’. This thesis takes the definition articulated by Ambrose et al. (2010, p. 3, drawing on Meyer, 2002): that learning is a “process that leads to change, which occurs as a result of experience and increases the potential for improved performance”. A definitive definition of ‘teaching’ is more difficult: within their exploration of teaching in “further, adult and vocational education”, Gregson et al. (2015, p. xi) refrain from defining the term explicitly, instead stating that “teaching is a complex activity requiring personal and professional qualities, which are not easy to capture in formal contracts of employment” (p. 15). This general definition is followed by their assertion that “the use of metaphor can help to bring some of the qualities to light”, and can also serve to draw “attention to the complexities of teaching” (p. 15). Elsewhere within the literature, teaching is defined as “engendering learning” (Marshall et al., 2019, p. 63). As will become clear later in this thesis, this broad and imprecise definition of teaching mirrors the broad and varying expectations of practitioners within the FE sector in Scotland.

2.3 Chapter two conclusion: building my conceptual framework.

Ravitch and Riggan (2016, p. 32) suggest that one function of an effective literature review is to support the researcher to “understand the conversations already happening within and across relevant fields”. Figure 2.1 shows how these areas of the literature were incorporated into the ‘topical research’ and ‘theoretical framework’ sections of my conceptual framework.

Within section 1.2.1, Ronnerman and Kemmis (2016)’s definition of practice was used to clarify my overarching aims in starting this Professional Doctorate: to become a “champion of change within...areas of professional practice” (Open Learn, 2020). Ronnerman and Kemmis’ definition of practice uses practitioners’ sayings, doings and relatings as a basis for understanding practice (2016, p. 95). This links to learning-focused concepts of assessment, which combine assessment into the learning process, as articulated in section 2.2.1. The embedding of assessment into all aspects of lecturers’ professional practice – planning, delivering, assessing, providing feedback – suggests that an exploration of assessment will allow insight into multiple aspects of lecturers’ professional practice. Furthermore, the centrality of assessment in terms of student experience and student learning as explored within section 2.2 emphasises the importance of assessment to the learning process. The links between concepts of assessment and practice are therefore clear, and justify the focus on assessment at this stage in the research process.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction
As articulated within section 1.2.1, the aim of this thesis is not to uncover a “universal truth” (Schweisfurth and Elliott, 2019, p. 6), but a “rich and contextually situated understanding” (McChesney and Aldridge, 2019) of the practices of lecturers within the FE context in Scotland. Drawing on Teram et al. (2005, p. 1130), it is clear that the approach to research has to be qualitative, given that I require data which is “experiential and contextualised”.

Crotty (1998, p. 13) asserts that “we need to lay [the] process out for the scrutiny of the observer”, this section will explore how my conceptual framework was developed during the planning phases of this research. It will outline both the choices that were made and those that were rejected whilst forging the methodology most appropriate for this research, given Crotty (1998, p. 14)’s assertion that, in order to create the best possible methodology for ourselves, our foci and our outcomes, we must “acquaint ourselves with various methodologies…evaluate their presuppositions...weave their strengths and weaknesses”. It will explain the ways in which ethical considerations were embedded into each stage of the research process. It will then explain the planned data collection and analysis methods, and how these were subsequently adapted during the research process.

3.2 Choosing a methodological framework.
A number of methodological frameworks were suitable for this research, given the aims outlined above.

3.2.1 Frameworks which were discounted.
Ethnography was one methodological framework which would have been appropriate for this research. Indeed, the first draft of the research questions included reference to the ‘lived experiences’ of the participants – a phrase associated with research questions framed within an ethnographic methodology. I had drawn upon Fine (2011, p. 48)’s explanation of ethnography as an examination of the “local context of the… [participants] and their activities” – my intention to study the specific factors which affect the articulation and implementation of the participants’ practices aligned with Fine’s explanation of the purpose of ethnographic study.

However, although they caution against confusing methods and methodologies, Scott-Jones and Watt (2010, p. 10) acknowledge that “participant observation” remains “central” to ethnographic research. As noted within the researcher’s conceptual framework (see section 1.2.1), the intention was not for participants to be framed as subjects being observed, but as active participants in the research process, empowered with their own agency within the research. Furthermore, the “‘thick’ description” (Scott-Jones and Watt, 2010, p. 8) that researchers aim to create within ethnographic methodologies about “the field setting and actions that occur within it” would not be feasible for this research, given the intention to hold group meetings which were not a standard part of the participants’ working practices. An ethnographic methodological approach was therefore discounted.

Case study methodologies were also considered, which would have allowed for “a detailed examination” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 214) of the FE practitioners’ articulation and implementation of formative feedback practices, and would have allowed me to construct knowledge that was specific to this research context (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 214). That this research could be characterised as ‘insider’ research, as will be explored within section 3.4.2, would have been welcomed within a case study methodology, given Flyvbjerg, (2006, p. 214)’s assertion that the “most advanced from of
learning is achieved when researchers place themselves within the context being studied”, as they are within a case study methodology. Case study, therefore, would have been an appropriate choice for multiple reasons.

However, my belief in the value of knowledge created by practitioners, as articulated within section 1.2, resulted in a search for a methodology which would empower the participants (the teaching practitioners) as one of the priorities. The interpretative theoretical perspective, as articulated above, included wanting to find solutions that were meaningful to the participants. Ethnography and case study methodologies were therefore both discounted; further methodological searching was required to find a methodology which would best fit the underlying research philosophies.

3.2.2 Adopting a pluralistic approach:
Crotty (1998, p. 14) suggests that “every piece of research is unique and calls for a unique methodology”. But Braun and Clarke (2021a, p. 44) “problematise the idea that there is – always – one perfect analytic method/ology” for qualitative analysis. Braun and Clarke (2021a, p. 37) describe how researchers should avoid a “hallowed method” quest, which is a term that could be used to describe the search articulated in sections 3.2.1, above, perhaps partly due to an “unspoken” belief that a “specific, identified and defined methodology” (Chamberlain et al., 2011, p. 152) was needed.

Instead, Chamberlain et al. (2011, p. 164) assert that “complex issues demand complex methodologies and methods”. The following section will explore how this research adopted a “pluralistic approach” (Chamberlain et al., 2011, p. 151), using both constructivist grounded theory and action research methodologies as contributing methodological frameworks.

3.2.2.1 Contributing methodological framework 1: action research
Action research was chosen as a contributing methodology, in part due to its aim of “working toward practical outcomes” (Reason and Bradbury, 2011, p. 6), drawing upon Lewis (1951, quoted in Lawson et al., 2015, p. 5)’s assertion that “the best way to understand and gain knowledge about any phenomenon is by trying to change it in its naturally occurring contexts”. Given that observing participants in their teaching practice had already been discounted as a method of gathering data, observations of the participants within these ‘naturally occurring contexts’ would not be possible. However, an action research methodology, with its distinct spiral of planning a change, acting on and observing the change, reflecting on the impact of the change, and then re-planning, re-acting and observing, etc. (Kemmis et al, 2014, p. 18), would allow the organisation of group meetings, in which the participants could discuss their plans, the changes that they made, and reflect collaboratively on the impact of their actions and the potential next steps. In this way, the data that would be collected would allow for an exploration of the participants’ views of their naturally occurring context. Furthermore, action research is viewed as a “living, emergent process” (Reason and Bradbury, 2011, p. 5) which develops the capacity of participants to investigate their own practice “as co-inquirers both individually and collectively (Reason and Bradbury, 2011, p.6); this view aligned with the ethical thinking discussed later within this chapter, in terms of an awareness of the impact of any research project on its participants.

Crotty (1998)’s assertion that the research methodology must align with the focus of the research itself was a further justification for this action research methodology. Kemmis (2010, p. 420) states that practitioners within education have a “collective responsibility...to contribute to the evolution of the professional practice” of which they are “stewards – custodians of the practice for their times and generation”. Kemmis (2010, p. 420) discusses the responsibility that teaching practitioners have “to protect, nurture, support and strengthen the practice for changing times and circumstances...as something that must always evolve to meet new historical demands”. Working within FE in the
Scottish context meant that lecturers within this study were indeed working a period of uncertainty, as explored within the opening chapter of this thesis. As articulated within section 1.2, the conceptual framework on which this research was based included a belief that the voices of practitioners were not being heard within these changing times and circumstances.

An action research methodology therefore seemed entirely appropriate for this research, given the focus and aims. Within the action research spiral, the first stage – planning a change – would allow participants to articulate and examine their current professional practices (Kemmis, 2010, p. 419). Doing so collectively would allow an exploration of the individual participants’ understanding of their practice (their “sayings” (Ronnerman and Kemmis, 2016, p. 95), and an exploration of the ways in which they related to each other (their “relatings” (Ronnerman and Kemmis, 2016, p. 95). Aligning the action research methodology with the underlying conceptualisation of practice, as explore within section 1.2 allowed me some confidence that the methodology and epistemology were complementary, as directed by Crotty (1998, p. 13). Furthermore, the choice of an action research methodology would also allow documentation of the practices of FE lecturers as they stand, which would be a contribution to practice in itself; as noted in section 1.2, the FE context is not widely explored within the literature. Kemmis (2010, p. 420) discusses the responsibility that practitioners have to “protect...support and strengthen the practice”, but it is difficult to protect or strengthen that which we do not fully understand. In documenting the current practices of lecturers within the FE context – and therefore increasing an understanding of the FE context - this research would support future practitioners to achieve Kemmis’ aims.

But the research aim was not just to explore the situation as it stands. An action research methodology would also allow for an exploration of the factors which have an impact on the articulation and implementation of assessment practices, and would also allow for assessment practices to be improved or developed. Realising this, an acknowledgement of the broader research aim was required. Chapter three starts with a stated aim of constructing a “rich and contextually situated understanding” (McChesney and Aldridge, 2019) of the ways in which teaching practitioners provide formative feedback in an FE learning context. Kemmis’ articulation of the “collective responsibility” (2010, p. 420) of educational practitioners as “stewards – custodians of the practice for their times and generation” was relevant to the research aim; there was an assumption that this research would work towards the development of “novel solutions to social problems...which are directed towards producing profound change in institutional contexts” (van Wijk et al., 2019, p. 889). Within this assumption was an expectation that there was a problem to be solved. I understood at this stage that I needed to ensure deeper reflexivity within this research, in order to ensure that I did not foist this assumption onto the participants and into the research itself. This was a further reason for the choice of an action research methodology; action research focuses on community action, and expects analysis of the “problem” being researched to be undertaken by the community itself, who share ownership of the research (Howell, 2015, p. 7). There is an “emphasis on cooperation between research and those concerned” (Gustavsen, 2014, p. 339), and a rejection of judgement from an external expert (Kemmis et al., 2014). Drawing upon this, and on Reason and Bradbury (2011, p. 6)’s assertion that “action research is participative research”, the methodological approach was defined more specifically: a participatory action research (PAR) methodology was selected. According to Johnson (2017, p. 4), PAR differs from other types of action research in terms of the extent to which the participants are involved in the design of the research purpose, the hypotheses (if appropriate) and the research questions themselves.

In determining the appropriate research methodology, I had engaged both with the strengths and the criticisms of the various methodologies available to me. I was aware of suggestions that action
research can be “partial, incomplete and inextricably bound to the contexts and rationales of the researcher and the positions which he or she may knowingly, or unknowingly represent” (Regehr, 2000, p.117, drawing on Altheide and Johnson, 1994). Following ethical guidelines produced by the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS), I knew that I needed to engage with these criticisms before adopting this methodology, given their assertion that “all social science should be conducted with integrity throughout, employing the most appropriate methods for the research purpose” (Academy of Social Sciences, 2015).

The view of action research as a “living” (Reason and Bradbury, 2011, p. 5) process which benefits the participants through increasing their capacity to investigate their own practice would, inevitably, be of benefit primarily to the small number of participants taking part in the research – therefore being open to criticisms of being ‘incomplete’. Furthermore, the knowledge gained from an investigation of the practices of a few practitioners from one context could certainly be considered a partial view of the FE context. However, I drew upon Reason and Bradbury (2011, p.6)’s uses of the terms first-, second- and third-person action research, as articulated with table 3.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-person action research</th>
<th>Addresses the ability of the researcher to take an inquiring approach to his/her practice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second-person action research</td>
<td>Addresses our ability to inquire with others into issues of mutual concern. Such collaborative enquiry develops communities of inquiry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-person research</td>
<td>Aims to extend the small scale projects (above) to create a wider impact.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This research would fall primarily into the second-person category. However, the “reporting of the process and outcomes” (Reason and Bradbury, 2011, p. 6) would fall into the third-person category, widening the impact of this research to further FE settings outside the research institution. Furthermore, the participants involved within the second-person action research project would potentially develop their own capacity to engage in first-person action research, which would, over the long term, widen the impact of this research in directions which I would not be able to foresee. Reason and Bradbury (2011, p. 6) suggest “that the most compelling and enduring kind of action research will engage all three strategies”. My understanding of action research at these three levels justified this choice of action research as a contributing methodology, and helped overcome the criticism of action research as partial or incomplete.

3.2.2.2 Contributing methodological framework two: grounded theory.
This articulation of first-, second- and third-person action research was not sufficient, however, to dispel my concerns about the criticisms of action research. I therefore drew upon Duckles et al. (2019)’s assertion that a grounded theory methodology can “provide the methodological rigor” that PAR studies may otherwise lack, and chose to adopt constructivist grounded theory (CGT) as the method of data analysis and as a further contributing methodological framework.

Adopting a grounded theory methodology within what I already knew to be research with a pluralistic approach was not a straightforward decision, given Bryant et al. (2007, p.11)’s assertion that “anyone contemplating the GTM [grounded theory method] landscape must grasp the inherent complexity of ...the ‘family of methods claiming the GTM mantle’”. It is not within the remit of this
thesis to provide an explanation of the GTM family members; it is sufficient to note that the following are defined as “integral for using grounded theory methodology” (Flick, 2018a, p. 3):

- Data gathering, analysis and construction proceed concurrently.
- Coding starts with the first interview.
- Memo writing begins with the first interview.
- Theoretical sampling is the disciplined search for patterns and variations. (Adapted from Flick, 2018a, p. 3).

These core research practices were incorporated into the research plans, and provided a clear structure to the data collection and analysis. These practices show why grounded theory must be seen as a methodology and not just an analytical / data collection method: they influenced the very structure of this research, as well as providing a means of analysis and collection.

Just as action research is characterised by an action research spiral, so too grounded theory can be viewed to take a circular process (Flick, 2018a, p.4) given the concurrent gathering, analysis and construction of data. As Flick (2018a) states: the analysis of the first data set raises questions which then “drive the sampling of the second case…the new data are then immediately analysed and compared to the first case” (Flick, 2018a, p. 5). This circular process seemed to complement the action research spiral which had been planned.

Of particular note within this research was the practice of memo-writing, which is described as “essential” (Lempert, 2007, p. 245; Flick, 2018a, p. 9) to conducting grounded theory research. As articulated by Lempert (2007, p. 249), memos act as “the fundamental link between data and emergent theory” and “provide a means for the researchers to engage in and record intellectual conversations with themselves about the data”. In some ways, memo-writing is similar to keeping a research diary, in that the memos serve to “record research and analytical progress, as well as thoughts and feelings, about data”.

My memo writing throughout the research process was in line with Lempert’s assertion that “memos…are often messy and incomplete, with undigested theories and nascent opinions” (2007, p. 258). Lempert describes an ‘anything goes’ attitude towards memo-writing, in that “whatever works is just fine in a memo” (p. 249). My memo-writing has been done in notebooks; as voice-recordings; scribbled in margins or on printed literature – but then typed up so as to keep a clear record of my thoughts. As Flick (2018a, p. 9) describes, engaging in continuous writing about the research “is also seen as a prerequisite for reflexivity about the research, participants, data, findings and outcomes”.

3.2.2.2.1 Constructivist grounded theory

From the grounded theory ‘family’ of methods, constructivist grounded theory (CGT) was specifically chosen. This approach to grounded theory was in line with Crotty (1998, p. 13)’s instruction that the focus of our research must align with our epistemology: within an exploration of the different approaches to grounded theory and their philosophical paradigms, Levers (2013, p. 6) asserts that “Charmaz’s “constructivist” approach to grounded theory fits with the constructionist paradigm”; CGT therefore aligned with my underpinning philosophy as outlined in section 1.2.2. Levers justifies this with reference to the idea that “meaning is dependent on, or relative to, the interaction of the viewer and the viewed” (2013, p. 5) within both constructivist grounded theory and the constructionist research paradigm. Here, I acknowledge that the terms are not synonyms, but also that the foundations of constructivist grounded theory can be found in the constructionist research paradigm. Indeed, Charmaz herself describes how “constructivist grounded theory has fundamental epistemological roots in sociological social constructionism” (2008, p. 409). Charmaz (2008b) refers
to “my constructionist approach” (p. 402) and discusses her approach to grounded theory “from my constructionist view” (p. 402). She explores how the term “constructivist grounded theory” (p. 409) has been used “to distinguish it from objectivist iterations” (p. 409) but how it can equally be explored “under the more general rubric of social constructionism” (p. 409). I was therefore satisfied that my constructionist epistemology would align appropriately with Charmaz’s constructivist approach to grounded theory, and that I could continue using the term ‘constructivist grounded theory’ without difficulties.

Furthermore, constructivist grounded theory includes an emphasis on a researcher’s reflexivity. Charmaz (2017a, p. 34) critiques much of the qualitative research undertaken with underpinning “Anglo-North American worldviews”, due to its analytical focus which is centred at “the level of individuals” (p. 37). Individualism, according to Charmaz (2017a, p. 37), is implicit within our assumptions and enters our research, and prevents us from acknowledging the extent to which people’s situations shape their lives. It can be mitigated by “methodological self-consciousness” (Charmaz, 2017a, p. 35), which requires scrutiny of “our positions, privileges and priorities” and a consideration of the extent to which they affect our research. For this research, within which I would hold the position of insider-researcher (see section 3.4.2), it was clear that a reflexive approach was required in order to mitigate the impact of the ‘positions’ I might represent – especially due to the fact that relationships with participants would inevitably be affected by the roles and positions I held within the research institution. Drawing upon Burman (2006, p. 316)’s explanation of reflexivity as “research that refuses the scientific positioning of the neutral observer” but instead highlights and explores “the nature of researcher involvement as a relevant resource”, and, by adopting a CGT methodology to this research, I ensured that this reflexivity would be fully incorporated into the research process.

3.2.3 Combining action research and constructivist grounded theory
The use of action research and grounded theory as complementary methodologies is well articulated within the literature. Grounded theory “develop(s) theory grounded in specific evidence” (Dick, 2007, p. 1), as action research does; it is flexible and responsive to the situation (Dick, 2007, p. 1), as action research is. Using grounded theory as a method of data analysis can also be seen to enhance action research projects, as will be explored within the following section.

Constructivist grounded theory, as articulated by Dick (2007, p.2), can enhance action research projects given its explicit directions as to how theory is built from evidence. These explicit directions provide a rigour which is harder to find within action research; Dick (2007, p. 5) asserts that within the action research literature, explanations of how to analyse data are not common. Charmaz (2017a) suggests that constructivist grounded theory, with its “pragmatist heritage” (p. 37), offers “tools to study temporality” (p. 38), which aligns with my own understanding of knowledge as situated and specific to the context and time in which it is produced. I was confident that the specific articulation of how to use these tools within the literature would provide the rigour which action research projects are said to lack.

3.2.4 Methodological choices and my underlying axiology
Constructivist grounded theory’s emphasis on reflexivity as articulated within section 3.2.2.2.1, combined with a focus on memo-writing, had ensured a diligent approach towards articulating my own position, values and assumptions within this research, including when selecting a methodological framework. I was aware that action research aligned with my axiology as explored within section 1.2 – my decision to embark on a professional doctorate, with its “focus on valuing professional practice” (Open University, 2021a), entirely aligned with action research methodologies
which are “based in a rather different paradigm from conventional academic research – because it has different purposes...has different ways of conceiving knowledge and its relation to practice” (Reason and Bradbury, 2011, p. 4).

My decision to incorporate a constructivist grounded theory approach also aligned with my axiology in terms of my belief that practitioners can become ‘champions of change’, as articulated within section 1.2. Constructivist grounded theory, with its “roots in pragmatism” (Charmaz, 2017a, p. 37), and its underlying “pragmatist goal of social reform” (Charmaz, 2017a, p. 34) links to this belief: as articulated by Charmaz (2017a, p. 37), research conducted within a CGT framework aims to “challenge current social and economic assumptions and arrangements”. Both contributing methodologies therefore aligned with my underlying axiology.

The literature also suggests that the decision to incorporate multiple methodologies might be due to my identity as a practitioner, as articulated within section 1.2. Humphrey (2012) cites Payne (2002) when describing practitioners as being theory-averse. Furthermore, Chamberlain et al. (2011) draw on Yanchar et al. (2005) to describe a “de-emphasis on method use per se in favour of a focus on the creative processes of theory formation... in this sense, methods become practice-oriented” (Yanchar et al., 2005, cited in Chamberlain et al., 2011, p. 154). My identity as a practitioner, therefore, may have influenced my decision to adopt a creative approach in selecting the methodological framework. If the goal of this research is to produce solutions which are meaningful to my community – i.e. practitioners, to a large extent – then it seems appropriate that my methodological decisions were made in line with my identity as a practitioner.

3.3 Planning the research.

Crotty (1998, p. 6) suggests that “given our goal of identifying and justifying the research process, it is important that we describe these methods as specifically as possible”. However, as articulated within section 3.2, above, my choice of a participatory action research methodology required acknowledgement that my plans might be subject to change, depending on the participants I recruited and their own research intentions.

The following section will therefore provide a detailed account of the research tools that I planned to use within this research. An account of the changes that were made will be provided within section 3.5.

Two distinct phases of research were planned, as articulated in table 3.2, although only within phase two was data that would be used within the analytical process collected. Prior to this, meetings were held with each individual participant, as outlined within ‘phase one’ of table 3.2. Although phase one of this research did not result in data that would be analysed, this phase of the research was crucial in terms of establishing an appropriate ethos and trust – and therefore merits mention within this section.

*Table 3.2 Working with participants in two phases.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase one</td>
<td>‘Timeline’ interviews</td>
<td>One interview per participant. Focus on the participant’s journey to becoming a teaching practitioner and their identity as a teaching practitioner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3.1 Timeline interviews

Timeline interviews, as explored by Adriansen (2012), were used as the first phase in the research process. This method of interviewing focuses on the visual representation of a timeline onto which relevant life events – both personal for the participant and wider contextual events - are plotted and explored. The aim of this stage of research was two-fold:

i) A method of setting the collaborative, participatory tone of the research project.

ii) A method of exploring and articulating participants’ understanding of the context in which their professional lives are framed, which would inform my understanding of the participants and their professional experiences.

There is coherence between this research tool and the underlying philosophy underpinning this research. As explored within section 1.2, my ontological understanding includes that knowledge is multiple, and is considered to be “constructed, reconstructed, negotiated and renegotiated in and through meaning” (McLaughlin, 2012, p. 30). This aligned with this timeline interview which can “make room for different lives, for the different stories” (Adriansen, 2012, p. 49) within participants’ lives, and allows participants to “de- and re-construct their story” (p.50) as they participate in the visual construction of events.

The timeline interview method also aligns with the participatory action research methodology, in that it allows interviewees to “take ownership of the timeline interview” (Adriansen, 2012, p. 48) in terms of the physical drawing of and writing on the timeline, which allows the interview to become a “collective process”. Furthermore, timeline interviews can be conducted in such a way as to allow the interviewee and interviewer to share the analytical power (Adriansen, 2012, p. 48): engaging the interviewee in “understanding his/her life in context” (p. 44) allows the construction of meaning to be a shared process between researcher and participant. The use of the visual timeline allows the researcher analysis to begin during the interview itself, and also allows the researcher to “check the initial interpretations with the participants” (Rimkeviiciene et al., 2016, p. 233) – thereby emphasising the participatory nature of the research process to the participants from the start of the research process.

As already mentioned, the purpose of this phase of the research was to establish trust between the participants and the researcher. Participants were provided with a recording of myself creating and discussing my ‘timeline’ (see Appendix A). I was conscious that I was asking participants to disclose information about themselves and that, in doing so, I was creating a distinction between myself as

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Phase two</th>
<th>Action Research group meetings, following Kemmis et al. (2014, p. 18)’s action research “spiral”.</th>
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</table>
| | i) “Planning a change”  
Discussion of assessment and feedback practices. Initial articulation of the ‘problems’, according to participants. |
| | ii) “Acting and observing the process and consequence of the change” |
| | iii) “Reflecting on these processes and consequences” |
| | iv) “Re-planning” |
the researcher and the participants as the ‘researched’. In an attempt to redefine our roles to be more in line with the participatory ethos I wanted to adopt, I wanted to share information about my professional experiences.

The timeline meetings were conducted online, using the software through which FE lecturers within the research institution deliver their teaching. Section 3.5.1.2 explores this in more detail.

3.3.2 Action research ‘spiral’

In order to collect data, I planned to bring the participants together as a group multiple times, to facilitate discussion of assessment practices. The aim at the time of planning this research was to encourage an articulation of the position of assessment and feedback processes within the participants’ practice, and then, in subsequent meetings, to explore and develop these processes through the action research spiral. The participant consent form and participant information sheet (see Appendix D) would ensure that participants understood the ongoing monthly commitment that this research entailed.

To facilitate the “social process of collaborative learning” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 20), the participant information form specified that the meetings between participants would be fixed and regular. But, given Kemmis et al. (2014, p. 18)’s assertion that action research is “rarely as neat as this spiral of self-contained cycles of planning, acting and observing, and reflecting suggests”, and that “the process is likely to be more fluid, open and responsive”, the fixed and regular nature of the meetings was the only thing that could be specified prior to the meetings taking place. Othieno et al. (2012, p. 5) assert that “various methods” can be used to “facilitate the discussions and encourage participation”, within an action research methodology, including “focus group discussions, brainstorming, role plays, market-place discussions, spider diagrams and Venn diagrams”. However, given that “responsibility for the research is taken collectively, by people who act and research together” (Kemmis et al, 2014, p. 16), the specific methods could not be specified without the participants’ input. This fluidity was articulated to the participants through the ‘proposed meeting schedule’ (Appendix B).

3.3.3 The sampling and recruitment strategies.

As will be explored within section 3.4.2, I was an insider-researcher within the research institution due to my role as a lecturer there. Gatekeeper access was granted based on the research plans outlined above. The aim was to recruit between five and eight participants.

Recruitment was focused on all teaching practitioners within the institution, through awareness-raising within the institutional newsletter, and through the institution’s Learning and Teaching Academy (LTA), for whom providing information about research within the institution is part of their remit (Research Institution, no date.).

Further to this, and given my position as an insider-researcher, it was also possible to approach individuals who I knew to have previously expressed an interest in areas of assessment, and for whom I believed the emancipatory nature of the research would be of interest. However, it was important that I did not mistake my own experience for the experience of others (Genat, 2009, p. 104), and that I did not overlook potential participants due to the limits of my knowledge of colleagues. Snowball sampling, a process in which existing participants provide contact information of other potential participants, was therefore also used as a method of selecting participants for whom the research project could be “highly significant” (Genat, 2009, p. 106). Snowball sampling “relies on and partakes in the dynamics of ... social networks”(Noy, 2008, p. 329); although a social network is not the same as a Community of Practice, nonetheless there are “a good deal”
(Meyerhoff and Strycharz, 2013, p. 432) of similarities between the two concepts. This would become more relevant later on in the research process (see section 4.1.2). At this stage in the research process, the underlying participatory ethos of the research was more relevant: participatory action research seeks to share analytical power with participants (Howell, 2015); snowball sampling is appropriate because it demands that the researcher “relinquishes a considerable amount of control over the sampling phase to the informants” (Noy, 2008, p. 332).

3.3.4 Eligible participants
Participants were eligible to take part in this research project providing that they met the following criteria:

I. That they were responsible for the delivery of at least one SQA FE unit in the first semester of academic year 2021/22. ‘FE’ is considered within the Scottish context to include courses up to SCQF level 7 (Appendix C shows how this compares with other qualification systems within the United Kingdom).

II. That the delivery of the unit or course was done in a ‘networked’ learning context. This means that the delivery would not be done exclusively as face-to-face delivery.

III. That they were in at least their second year of teaching at the research institution.

IV. That they perceived assessment and feedback practices to be important and therefore wished to explore assessment and feedback within their professional (teaching) practice.

The specific reference to the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) within criteria one was made to provide common ground within the participant group, as was the reference to the ‘networked’ learning context in criterion two. Criterion three was set to reduce the potential burden for participants. Criterion four aligned with the critical participatory action research methodology: research is only possible when members of the group hold “an imperfectly understood felt concern and a desire to take action” (McTaggart, 1994, p. 316) within a specified area.

3.4 Ethical considerations during the planning stages
At this point in the research process, it was necessary to apply for ethical approval. The “evolving nature” (Gelling and Munn-Gidding, 2011, p. 101) of action research projects can be problematic for ethics committees; before applying for ethical approval through the Open University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), the five ‘generic ethics principles’ produced by the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS), were used to provide reassurance to HREC. These principles are designed to explore “standards of acceptable practice and the rationale for these” (Academy of Social Sciences, 2015); given that it was not possible to list the specific steps within the AR spiral, due to the methodological foundations I had adopted, I used these principles to show how ethical considerations would be embedded into the research process.

3.4.1 Using ethics principles
This section will summarise how the ethics principles produced by the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS) were used at this stage of the research process. The Open University guidelines (2021b) emphasise the need for researchers to consider ethics “at every stage in the research process”.

1. Social science is fundamental to a democratic society and should be inclusive of different interests, values, funders, methods and perspectives.
Action research can be described as modelling “democratic procedures that are fully inclusive and give a voice to all participants” (O’Hanlon, 2003, p. 28). Basing the research on participatory action research (PAR) methodological foundations therefore ensured that this principle was embedded.

2. All social science should respect the privacy, autonomy, diversity, values, and dignity of individuals, groups and communities.

PAR was chosen in order to show respect to those who will form the participant group, and to overcome the criticism that action research “may be carried out for the purposes of a programme or assignment rather than for the authentic needs of the teacher” (Bradshaw et al., 2014, p. 11).

I requested consent from participants prior to the start of the research project. However, given that “evolving nature” of AR research, the participant information sheet (Appendix D) could only inform participants of the initial exploratory stage. I therefore decided to contact each participant individually after the first few meetings, to ensure that they were happy with the direction and process of the meetings.

For Genat (2009, p. 111), participants must be given opportunities to challenge the “accuracy and adequacy” of the researcher’s representations of the action research process. Mindful of this, documentation such as the minutes of the meetings was shared with the participants. Participants were encourage to challenge the ways in which the research process was recorded.

3. All social science should be conducted with integrity throughout, employing the most appropriate methods for the research purpose.

Genat (2009, p. 103) asserts that the “practitioner role embodied by the researcher is critical to the study” in terms of the way that the researcher “negotiates, engages and facilitates research”. The data collection methods were designed with this ethical consideration in mind.

Firstly, timeline interviews enabled “closer contact and more trusting atmosphere” (Adriansen, 2012, p. 47) due, in part, to the “use of artefacts/paper and lack of eye contact” and the sharing of analytical power. The timeline interviews also provided an opportunity for an individual meeting between the researcher and each participant, which can also “affirm the legitimacy of the study, establish rapport and acknowledge respondents’ commitment to the study” (Hinchcliffe and Gavin, 2009, p. 324).

The data analysis method of constructivist grounded theory (CGT) was chosen to support the PAR methodology. Research based on action research methodologies may be subject to scepticism due to a belief that methodological rigour has been sacrificed in order to focus on the research problem itself, and “may be affected by the dynamics of the situation” (Badger, 2000, p. 201). Constructivist grounded theory was therefore chosen as another contributing methodology because of the strict framework which it requires; this strict framework would provide the rigour required by those sceptical of the necessarily less pre-ordained structure of data collection methods within PAR.

4. All social scientists should act with regard to their social responsibilities in conducting and disseminating their research.

The particular challenges and responsibilities associated with conducting this research during the Covid-19 pandemic require further exploration. Within their exploration of how times of crisis such as the coronavirus pandemic “heighten conditions of vulnerability and inequality”, Bond et al. (2020)
call for analytical methods which consider the power dynamics inherent within research. Research methodologies which emphasise participation, including PAR, are a clear response to this call.

The choice of an AR methodology brings specific responsibilities for those who hold a position of insider-researcher. Participants may not know “to whom they are consenting”, given the “multiple roles” held by the lead researcher (Gelling and Munn-Giddings, 2011, p. 104): for participants, I was both a colleague and a researcher. Trowsdale (2020) explains how she provided her participants with examples of how she had “used participants’ voices in previous reports”. Although I had no published research available at the time of starting data collection, I had previously conducted and disseminated research within my institution which sought the views of students and staff. By drawing attention to this work within the participant information sheet (Appendix D), it was hoped that the participants would “understand how their data might signify” (Trowsdale, 2020), which would increase their capacity to give informed consent.

5. All social science should aim to maximise benefit and minimise harm.

PAR is “guided by an interest in emancipating people and groups from irrationality, unsustainability and injustice” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 14), and by a desire to make social practices “more rational and reasonable, more productive and sustainable and more just and inclusive” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 35). The intended benefits of this research therefore aligned with this ethical requirement.

3.4.2 Insider-researcher

Punch and Rogers (2022, p. 278) state that “insider research takes place when the researcher is part of the population they are studying” - which, given the research focus on lecturers within one institution, was true for this research. As part of the application for ethical approval, it was necessary to consider my position as an insider-researcher. Potential problems for the participants had been considered within reference to the ‘social responsibilities’ within AcSS principle four (Academy of Social Sciences, 2015) above. It was also necessary to consider the other potential impacts of being an insider-researcher.

Punch and Rogers (2022) discuss the disadvantages for insider-researcher within the data analysis phase of the research. They suggest that insider-researchers may be unable to “see instances of bias that may have been taken-for-granted” (p. 279) due to the insider-research normalising the behaviours or ideas. By contrast, they suggest that ‘outsiders’ are “unaware of, and perhaps unencumbered by previous knowledge of group dynamics” (p. 278). Awareness of this led to the adoption of metaphor analysis as a further method of data analysis, as explored within section 3.6.

Despite these difficulties, the “valuable insights and insider epistemology” (Punch and Rogers, 2022, p. 278) accessible to insider-researchers are noted within the literature. I intended that the reflexive approach to research that I had adopted, for example through the choice of CGT methodology, would allow me to mitigate the potential disadvantages of insider-research and capitalise on the benefits that it can bring.

Ethical approval was granted through The Open University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Reference: HREC/3957/ Wilson). The submitted form can be found in Appendix F.

3.4.3 Ethical considerations: conclusion

This section has articulated some of the ways in which ethical considerations were made transparent during the planning stages of this research. As suggested within the Open University guidance (2021b, p. 5), ethical thinking was embedded during “all stages of the research”. The remaining
sections of chapter three will explain the decisions that were made during the data collection and analysis stages, including references to ethical considerations.

3.5 Conducting the research.

This section will explore the ways in which the plans outlined above were put into action. Given the contributing methodologies on which this research is based, and given the participatory and flexible nature of them both, this section will explain the changes that were made to the plans, and the rationale behind these changes. It will also emphasise my adherence to the idea that ethical thinking should be embedded “at every stage in the research process” (Open University, 2021b, p. 5).

Grounded theory is an “iterative, comparative and interactive method” (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2019, p. 744) in which the early analyses are used “to identify which data to subsequently collect”. As such, this account of the ways in which the research was conducted will be split into three distinct phases. Section 3.5.1 will explore the initial stages of the research process, including the recruitment of participants; the ways in which the timeline interviews were conducted, and the first action research meetings. Section 3.5.2 will explore the initial coding phase and the direction that the research took after the initial coding activity had started; Section 3.5.3 describes the move towards focused coding and the construction of the categories.

Section 3.6 will then explore my use of metaphor analysis as a further analytical method which was used primarily for ethical reasons, as a means of confirming and validating my understanding of the participants’ thoughts, ideas and values.

3.5.1 Initial stage: recruitment of participants; timeline interviews; initial meetings

3.5.1.1 The participants.

Recruitment of participants, following the methods set out in section 3.3.3, started in May 2021. By the end of the academic year, eleven participants had committed to take part in the research. Unfortunately, due to the eligibility criteria outlined in section 3.3.4, this had reduced to eight by the start of academic session 2021-22. This reduction was due to the first criterion; the timetable for academic session 2021-22 did not give them responsibility for the delivery of the required SCQF level of SQA units for that first semester.

The remaining eight participants were from a range of professional backgrounds, with varying years’ experience teaching, and a wide variety of professional qualifications. A general summary of the participants’ characteristics is provided within table 3.3; for ethical reasons, it is not possible to provide further, potentially identifying, details.

Table 3.3: General summary of participant details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Between 23 and 70</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years’ teaching experience (total)</td>
<td>0-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years’ teaching within the research institution</td>
<td>0-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5.1.2 The timeline interviews
3.5.1.2.1 Setting up the timeline interviews.

The timeline interviews were conducted using Webex, which is the standard video conferencing software used within the research institution. The decision to hold these interviews within an online meeting space was made primarily for ethical reasons. Measures in Scotland in response to the global Covid-19 pandemic had recently been changed at the time of the first timeline interview, which took place on the 1st June 2021. At that time, indoor meetings of a maximum of six people from three households were permitted, and non-essential journeys within a local authority area had only been permitted since the beginning of April (Scottish Parliament, 2021). The limits of these restrictions, eased as they had been, show the level of societal consideration about meeting indoors in a face-to-face situation. Insisting on face-to-face meetings with the participants within this context of Covid-19 restrictions would not have been ethically appropriate, especially given the dispersed geography of the research participants and the focus on ‘staying local’ within the Scottish restrictions.

The choice of Webex was, again, based primarily on ethical grounds. Within their exploration of the challenges of conducting research within online environments, Carter et al. (2021, p. 713) discuss the potential “burden and stress” that may be felt by participants who “do not feel competent” in the use of technology – and how this can lead to the exclusion of some participants or a reduced confidence in the validity of the data collected. To mitigate this risk, the research interviews and meetings were conducted through the video-conferencing software that was used by participants within their everyday practice. Teaching at the research institution had been conducted using Webex since the closure of the FE college centres in March 2020 due to the global Covid-19 pandemic; all teaching practitioners at the research institution had access to this software and had been using it regularly within their professional practice. The choice of Webex as the software through which the research would be conducted was what Carter et al. (2021, p. 713) describe as a “mindful and consultative technological…choice”; a deliberate ethical decision which I took to reduce the ethical challenges of conducting research in an online environment.

Webex software allows users to set meetings up in two main ways. One involves sending a meeting invitation directly to somebody’s calendar; the other sends the meeting invitation as a web link, for example within the body of an email. Again, mindful of the ethical requirements to protect the participants’ confidentiality, the latter option was chosen, primarily to ensure that the participants’ decisions to participate in this research would not be obvious to anyone accessing their work calendar or schedule. Each meeting space was accessible only to myself and the one individual participant.

The purpose of the timeline interview was articulated within the meeting invitation as follows: “The purpose of it is to give a sense of who you are as a teacher – your background/your values etc. through an exploration of significant events in your career which have shaped your practice today”. Conscious of the participants’ workload, the email specifically stated that the participants were not
expected to do any preparation for the interview. A recording was also attached of myself discussing aspects of my professional timeline (see Appendix A). I clarified that mine was a monologue and would therefore differ to the two-way interview that the participants would experience. However, to establish a trusting, participatory atmosphere to the interview, it seemed appropriate to share something of my personal timeline with participants. All eight participants noted that the recording had been useful in clarifying their understanding of the purpose of the interview.

3.5.1.2.2 Conducting the timeline interviews
Webex software allows its users to access a virtual whiteboard. Before each timeline interview, user privileges were enabled so that we could both annotate the virtual whiteboard. The intention was to draw the timeline on this whiteboard, and to invite the participants to annotate it as appropriate – the hope was that such an invitation would establish a participatory tone from the start of the research interactions.

Technical difficulties occurred during one of my eight timeline interviews – for some reason the participant was unable to view the whiteboard. For this participant, I drew the timeline onto a sheet of paper, and emailed photos of it at regular intervals during the interview, to ensure that they were happy with my representation of their ‘timeline’. In this way, I hoped to uphold the collaborative ethos of the interview despite the technological difficulties that we were experiencing.

Each of the eight interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour and was recorded with the participants’ consent. At the start of each interview, participants were reminded of the purpose of the interview. Participants were then asked where they would “like to start?”. For each event articulated by participants, follow-up questions were asked to enable articulation of the impact of that event on their practice, often phrased in terms of “how has this shaped you as a practitioner?”.

Participants described each event in as much detail as they wished to provide, and indicated when they were ready to move on to the next event. Notes were made onto the virtual whiteboard and participants were asked to confirm whether these notes summarised their thoughts appropriately; changes were made to the whiteboard notes where necessary. In this way, the interviews were conducted in line with constructionist values, in terms of data (in this case the interview transcripts and the whiteboard annotations) being “co-constructed between researchers and research participants” (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2019, p.744).

Upon completion of the interviews, the transcript made by the Webex software was checked and corrected against the recording. The transcript was then emailed to the participants, along with a copy of the whiteboard, to ensure that they were happy with the written copy of the interview. Within the email, it was also explained that the next phase of the research would begin in the first semester of the next academic year.

3.5.1.3 The action research meetings
3.5.1.3.1 Setting up the action research meetings.
Webex was again used as the software through which the meetings would be conducted. Once again, for ethical reasons, the Webex meeting link was not published onto the participants’ work calendars, but instead emailed to the participants individually. The participants were also contacted individually by email at the start of the academic session, to ensure that they were happy to continue with the research project and to reiterate that the subsequent meetings would be collaborative. At this stage, participants were also told the identity of the other participants in the research. Participants were invited to contact the researcher if they had any potential issues regarding the identity of the other participants, and also reminded of their right to opt out of the
research should they wish to. The need to keep the involvement of other participants confidential was also emphasised. From the participants’ responses, I was satisfied that all participants understood the importance of this.

3.5.1.3.2 Conducting the action research meetings.
Appendix B shows the proposed meeting schedule for the action research meetings. As shown on Appendix B, the initial action research meeting had been planned for August 2021, at the start of the academic year. In response to participants’ requests, however, the start of the research was delayed until September 2021, given the initial stresses of the start of the academic year. It was also difficult to schedule a time that suited all eight of the participants; it was decided that two options for the initial meeting would be organised. Participants were encouraged to attend whichever suited their availability. The advantages to organising two options per meeting quickly became apparent – smaller numbers of participants at each meeting resulted in participants having more ‘air time’ to discuss their ideas and make their feelings clear. Having two options per meeting also aligned with the choice of grounded theory as data analysis method (as explored within section 3.5.2 below), in terms of its “iterative, comparative” (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2019, p. 743) nature: it was possible to use the data gathered within the first of each month’s meetings to guide the discussions within the second. In line with Charmaz and Belgrave’s assertion that “we use our early analyses to identify which data to subsequently collect” (2019, p. 744), giving participants two options per meeting seemed to be of benefit to the ethos of the chosen analytical method. This arrangement therefore continued for the rest of the semester, and participants attended whichever of the monthly meetings suited them best. Although this effectively doubled the amount of time required to conduct the meetings, and doubled the number of transcripts that needed to be checked, amended and analysed, I was confident that this was an appropriate and beneficial change to make to the research methods – and confident that this change was not to the detriment of any of the participants.

3.5.2 The second stage: initial coding and continued data collection
Grounded theory is an “iterative, comparative and interactive method” (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2019, p. 743) in which the early analyses are used “to identify which data to subsequently collect”. Pulker (2019, p. 66) articulates this “continuum between data collection and data analysis” within figure 3.1, basing her work on Hennebo (2009).

![Figure 3.1: Illustration of the “continuum between data collection and data analysis” (Pulker, 2019,p. 66).](image-url)
This research project followed a similar model, as outlined within figure 3.2, which is an adaptation of Pulker’s articulation.

![Figure 3.2: Adaptation of Pulker (2019)’s model, as relevant to this research.](image)

The data to be analysed was primarily taken from the transcripts of the recorded sessions, as articulated within the data management plan (DMP) in Appendix E. A CGT analysis approach to analysis was used, as articulated by Johnson (2014, p. 105): starting with the initial coding stage, the transcript was examined on a line-by-line basis, with the intention of “seeking to label and conceptualise the patterns of action and meaning”. Given the iterative nature of this analytical method, the codes were checked against each other, “to inductively construct theory grounded in the data” (Johnson, 2014, p. 106).

Clarke et al. (2018, p. 113) instruct researchers to “follow your theoretical excitement in new directions” depending on the discussions and the direction in which research within a CGT methodology moves. The principles of PAR methodology empower participants to engage with issues as they perceive them. It was in line with both of my contributing methodologies, therefore, to allow the research to move in directions different to those that had been envisaged prior to the start of the research. Given their focus on the SQA, and following guidance from my supervisors, I suggested to the participants that we engage with the public consultation regarding that awarding body which was ongoing at the time (see section 2.1.2). Action research meetings 3a and 3b were therefore dedicated to the collaborative writing of the responses to the consultation questions.

Another important emerging idea was one related to training and staff development. The participants were unanimous in their belief that the training and resources provided to new lecturers were not sufficient regarding formative assessment itself. The participants declared an interest in creating a resource for new lecturers which would explain the purpose of formative assessment and provide suggestions as to how to implement formative assessment practices. Action research meetings 5a and 5b focused on this, and the resource that we wrote became a further form of data that could be analysed.
Appendix G shows the final focus for each of the action research meetings, which differs from the planned schedule articulated in Appendix B. Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) suggest that this change in focus can be considered an indication of quality, given the grounded theory methodological framework underpinning my data analysis. This change – as explained above – resulted in a change in direction in the data collection methods, in terms of generating new ‘types’ of data to collect (the consultation document and the training resource). However, although Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) assert that the change in focus could be a positive indication of quality, my memo-writing from this period betrays an anxiety that the research was moving in directions that I did not understand, as shown in figure 3.3, below. There was a disconnect between the personal interest that formed part of my conceptual framework (i.e my focus on assessment) and the interests of the participants, which seemed to relate primarily to tensions between their practice and that of other stakeholders in the FE context such as the SQA. It was not until I had conducted the second, “focused” (Straughair, 2019, p. 3) literature review that I was able to incorporate these new directions into my conceptual framework, as will be discussed within chapter four.

Figure 3.3: Memo 29/11/21 Publishable version

3.5.3 The third stage: focused coding

3.5.3.1 Moving towards focused coding.
Within the ongoing collection, examination and comparison of my data, I was aware of the need to move towards focused coding. Charmaz and Thornberg (2021, p. 308) assert that the focused coding stage allows a researcher to “streamline your subsequent data collection to gather targeted data”, and that engaging in focused coding is one of the built in “checks... that contribute to its [the research’s] quality”. I was aware, therefore, of the need to progress with this step, but, as suggested
within figure 3.3, I was struggling to articulate – or perhaps identify – the wider codes around which other codes “coalesce”, which for Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) is one of the features which help to identify focused codes. As with other qualitative research methodologies (e.g. discourse analysis where, according to Braun and Clarke (2021a, p. 44), the literature provides directions which are “less concrete and often based in concepts, ideas and practices, rather than guidelines”), I found the literature relating to the grounded theory analytical method to be specific and clear about what was required, but less useful in terms of how it should be done.

I started with Charmaz and Thornberg (2021, p. 307)’s instruction to define the codes by their “properties or characteristics”. Using Nvivo software, I had assigned initial codes to the content within my transcripts; now, I examined the initial codes and tried to define them. These definitions allowed me to highlight similarities between codes; it was an important part of the ‘constant comparison’ process required within the grounded theory methodology. In writing these definitions I was forced to pinpoint the essence of each code, which was the first step in seeing the wider, focused codes that I could define.

The articulation of these definitions, combined with the act of writing memos provoked an important development in the coding process which, had I not been following a grounded theory methodology which emphasises the memo writing component, I am not confident would otherwise have occurred. My memo writing was mostly done by hand into a notebook and meant that, whilst coding and defining codes within the Nvivo software, I had a pen and paper to hand. In trying to define the essence of each of my initial codes, I would find myself idly doodling on the page. I realised that, as expressed by Parkih (2020, p. 441), “the process of drawing … can also provide new ways of seeing and analysing”. I saw that the drawings that I was creating were visual representations which could, according to Carpenter (2008, p. 275) be used to both “provide structure to the data” and to “reduce and sort volumes of data into meaningful conceptual categories” – and subsequently went back to my transcripts and codes to see to what extent this was true. Figures 3.4 – 3.6 show examples of the visual representations.

Figure 3.4: Visual representation example one – my visual representation of ‘multiple requirements within lecturers’ role’
3.5.3.2 Reflexivity within the coding process

It is important to emphasise that the drawings I created were highly subjective responses to the data, to my emerging definitions of the initial codes, and to the codes themselves. I drew upon Braun and Clarke (2021b, p. 330)’s guidance regarding the “importance of the researcher’s subjectivity as an analytic resource”. Demonstrating coding reliability using methods such as the employment of independent coders can be appropriate for some research situated within a
qualitative paradigm, but these measures are not appropriate for research such as this, due to it being framed within a grounded theory methodology which “requires strong reflexivity throughout the research process” (Charmaz and Thornberg, 2021, p. 315). Reflexive qualitative methods emphasise a researcher’s “reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation” (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 330). In research situations where the researcher’s subjectivity is used in this way, “coding reliability and the avoidance of ‘bias’ is illogical, incoherent and ultimately meaningless” (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 334).

Instead, Braun and Clarke (2021b) suggest that, because of the underlying epistemological foundations, and because “researcher subjectivity is conceptualised as a resource for knowledge production which inevitably sculpts the knowledge provided” (p. 334), a researcher must instead “fully embrace…the subjective skills the researcher brings to the process” (p. 333).

Being aware of the need to act reflexively and to find ways to document the thought processes which were underlying the coding process, I drew again upon Parikh (2020, p. 440)’s assertion that drawing can provide a “nuanced way(s) to narrativize the landscape and reflexively position oneself within it”.

Although I had understood Braun and Clarke (2021b, p. 330)’s guidance regarding the “importance of a researcher’s subjectivity as an analytic resource”, I was conscious also of the requirements of my two contributing methodologies, which I considered to be in conflict with each other:

i) Participatory action research, which emphasises “co-constructed knowledge” and “participation in the textual aspects of meaning making” (Grant et al., 2008, p. 593), including the analysis of data.

ii) Constructivist grounded theory, which requires researchers to ensure that their analysis is “grounded in data” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 162).

Having created a number of drawings which I felt might provide Carpenter’s structure and categories (as discussed above), I asked the participants whether the drawings were an accurate or appropriate summary of that which we had discussed. In doing so, my aim was to honour the emphasis on “co-constructed knowledge” inherent within the PAR methodology – and, therefore, to resolve the conflict which I felt was inherent within the two contributing methodologies.

Table 3.4 shows some of the responses I received. It was clear that some of the metaphors had struck a chord with the participants: this gave me the confidence to identify these as ‘significant’, and led to them becoming the focused codes, following Charmaz (2008a)’s guidance.

Table 3.4: Examples of participant responses to the visual representations of the codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant responses</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The metaphors work well for me – or at least some of them – they encapsulate my feelings/thoughts better, in some ways, than a lot of description.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This looks really good. I think the drawings perfectly fit what the transcript says.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love your drawings!! It’s all looking good, Susie, well done you!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My gut reaction is positive.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the image of juggling targets! (Relating to figure 3.4, above)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How about (if drawing skills up to it, mine aren’t) a picture of trying to squeeze lots of things into a tiny box, or through a narrow door? (A suggestion relating to figures 3.4 and 3.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Figure 3.6) doesn’t really work for me because a single target suggests clarity whereas I’m thinking the message is more about narrowness.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
That monster is cheery not scary! I think we need to convey the threatening nature of the process not present a smiley happy chappy (Relating to a hand-drawn monster, through which I was trying to represent the participants’ perceptions of threat and danger).

In contrast, some of the visual representations did not align with the participants’ thoughts. For example, the metaphor drawing I had created of a single target (figure 3.6) did not receive positive feedback from the participants. I had followed Charmaz’s guidance to use “imaginative interpretation” to identify “all possible theoretical accounts for the observed data” (2008, p. 156), but the initial check with the participants suggested that my interpretation was inaccurate. Looking back over my initial codes and data (and therefore honouring the emphasis on checking that my analyses were ‘grounded in data’, as articulated by Charmaz, above), I could see that the participants had not identified the requirements of the awarding body as ‘narrow’ at any point. There were ideas of rigidity and prescription within the data, but not of narrowness or focus, as my metaphor had implied. Looking more closely at the data and at my initial codes, I could see repetition of words such as ‘confusion’ and ‘misalignment’ – which were not in any way reflected in my drawing. I did not therefore incorporate any of the ideas embedded within that visual representation into my focused codes, but instead used the information I had gained about the importance of ‘confusion’ and ‘misalignment’ as a starting point for the development of another of the focused codes. The full list of the focused codes can be found in Appendix H, and is discussed in detail within chapter four.

3.5.3.3 Moving towards focused coding: metaphor analysis.

As explored within section 3.5.3.2, the responses outlined within table 3.4. gave me confidence that I had broadly understood the participants’ perspectives and thoughts. This was advantageous in some respects; I felt that the participants’ responses showed that my understandings of their discussions – and the drawings that I had then produced aligned with Charmaz and Thornberg (2011)’s criterion of ‘resonance’, as described within section 3.5.3.2, above. I was confident that the focused coding that would follow would therefore be ethically sound. However, Clegg and Stevenson (2013) highlight the disadvantages that can occur with insider research in terms of “the sheer immersion of the researcher in the field she is researching” (p.7), and how, should the research fail “to break with our common-sense knowing” (p.6), the process of systematic interpretation can remain hidden from view. Drawing on LaSala (2003) and Perry et al. (2014), Hayfield and Huxley (2015) suggest similar ideas in terms of the “risk of the insider overlooking parts of the data if they take-for-granted its content”. I was concerned, therefore, that the analysis of this data would fall short of the standards required for ethical and useful research due to my position as an insider-researcher, and my ‘common sense’ understanding of the practices of the participants. I needed to find ways to “go beyond the everyday understanding of which s/he is a member” (Humphrey, 2012, p. 581).

The discourse dynamics framework (Cameron and Maslen, 2010; Cameron et al., 2009) provides one way of exploring participants’ discourse, by exploring metaphor use in order to “uncover people’s ideas, attitudes and values” (Cameron et al., 2009, p. 64). This discourse dynamics framework focuses on working with the metaphors (Cameron and Maslen, 2010, p. 118) used by the participants. This focus “allows us to focus temporarily on the metaphorical ‘world’ rather than the discourse ‘world’, which provides an atmosphere of greater objectivity” (Cameron and Maslen, 2010, p. 118). As an insider-researcher, having a specific focus on the metaphorical worlds that the participants used would allow me to explore the ideas, attitudes and values underlying their discussions about their working practices, rather than letting my knowledge of the everyday practices to which they would refer affect my analysis. Cameron and Maslen (2010, p.118) rephrase this as follows: “we avoid trying to second guess what the speakers meant and concentrate on the words they actually said”.
I adopted this analytical method as a response to my concerns that my insider-researcher status would negatively impact upon the eventual findings and conclusions, and used it as a mechanism for ensuring validity within the findings and conclusions. Following Cameron and Maslen (2010)’s guidance, I conducted a metaphor analysis of the first group meetings, which were held in September 2021. Cameron and Maslen (2010, p. 77) explain that “the discourse dynamics framework is designed to apply to metaphor in language use in social interactions”; it would have been inappropriate for me to apply this framework to any of the other data that had been collected, such as the response that the group had written to the SQA consultation.

However, I did not consider it necessary to conduct a metaphor analysis on the transcripts of all the group meetings; Cameron and Maslen (2010, p. 38) suggest that it can be appropriate for researchers to “focus metaphor analysis on a subset of their data due to the fact that “it can be extremely time consuming to identify all of the metaphors in a large corpus of texts”. Furthermore, the metaphor analysis was not intended to be the main method of data analysis; the purpose of the metaphor analysis was as an additional measure to ensure trustworthiness and ethical validity.

3.6 Conducting the metaphor analysis.
Cameron and Maslen (2010) use the terms ‘vehicle’ and ‘topic’ to describe the two parts of a metaphor. The topic, according to Cameron and Maslen (2010), is the contextual meaning of the metaphor – the target being discussed within the metaphor. The vehicle is the word or phrase being used to describe the topic. For example, within the metaphor ‘Juliet is the sun’, Cameron and Maslen (2010, p. 103) describe ‘Juliet’ as the ‘topic’, and ‘the sun’ as the ‘vehicle’. Cameron and Maslen (2010, p. 4) draw on Burke (1945) to explain that the vehicle “contrasts with the meaning of the discourse at that point” (2010, p. 4); the vehicle often looks “somehow incongruent” (p. 4) within the discourse.

According to Cameron and Maslen (2010), the first step in conducting a metaphor analysis is to prepare the data. Firstly, the researcher lists the metaphors within the chosen section of discourse. Following Cameron and Maslen (2010)’s guidance, I used a simple spreadsheet to collect the data from the initial transcripts, as shown within table 3.5, below.

Table 3.5: An excerpt from the spreadsheet showing the metaphor list of one transcript.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metaphor</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Intonation unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gauge</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>LH</td>
<td>...it could be to gauge.. the learning...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tool</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>LH</td>
<td>...learning tool...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>craft</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>LH</td>
<td>...I try to craft it...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tool</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>LH</td>
<td>..that's why I use it for I think as a tool...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lee way</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>LH</td>
<td>..sometimes we have got a little bit of lee way as they don't understand...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>handicap</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>DG</td>
<td>...I do think that's been a handicap over the past 18 months...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>measure</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>EB</td>
<td>...measure how well they're doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drown</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>LH</td>
<td>...drowning amount of summative assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>create</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>HM</td>
<td>...create formative assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>out the door</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>HM</td>
<td>...as soon as you've got that one out the door</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For ethical reasons, the initials within the ‘Speaker’ column of tables 3.5 and 3.6 are pseudonyms.

Using this list, the next step was to group the metaphor vehicles. Cameron and Maslen (2010)’s guidance regarding this aspect of the metaphor analysis was detailed and clear. Their “guiding principle” (2010, p. 118) is that the “labels of groupings should remain as specific as possible”, and
that researchers should “avoid giving names to vehicle groupings which abstract or generalise beyond the evidence in the data”.

Table 3.6 An excerpt from the spreadsheet showing the metaphor lists and vehicle groupings of one transcript.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vehicle group</th>
<th>Metaphor</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Intonation unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>gauge</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>LH</td>
<td>...it could be to gauge...the learning...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual labour (make)</td>
<td>craft</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>LH</td>
<td>...I try to craft it...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual labour</td>
<td>tool</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>LH</td>
<td>..that's why I use it for I think as a tool...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permitted deviation</td>
<td>lee way</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>LH</td>
<td>..sometimes we have got a little bit of lee way as they don't understand...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindrance</td>
<td>handicap</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>DG</td>
<td>...I do think that's been a handicap over the past 18 months...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>measure</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>EB</td>
<td>...measure how well they're doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>submerge</td>
<td>drown</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>LH</td>
<td>...drowning amount of summative assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make</td>
<td>create</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>HM</td>
<td>...create formative assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leave</td>
<td>out the</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>HM</td>
<td>as soon as you've got that one out the door</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are similarities between this process and the grounded theory coding process, in part because the researcher is encouraged to “work inductively from the data, rather than starting from assumptions” (Cameron and Maslen, 2010, p. 118). Table 3.6 shows the same excerpt of data with the initial metaphor grouping that I constructed.

Once all vehicles had been grouped, the vehicle grouping labels and metaphor vehicles are collected together, as displayed within table 3.7. This step allowed for a checking of the initial codes – for example through checking whether the metaphors “vary strikingly in the manner of action they depict” (Cameron and Maslen, 2010, p. 123).

Table 3.7: An excerpt of the vehicle groupings list for one transcript, following Cameron and Maslen’s (2010) discourse dynamics framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vehicle groupings</th>
<th>Metaphor vehicles collected into this grouping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>further down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindrance</td>
<td>handicap; struggle; stumbling block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold</td>
<td>holding (to hope)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journey</td>
<td>towards; progress; traffic light; cruise; approach; gearing towards; journey; distance; signpost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave</td>
<td>out the door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link</td>
<td>tied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>on to; behind; get (something) over; end (of the world)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Care is taken at this stage of the process to ensure that the grouping labels are not generalised at too high a level, as “a label at too high a level may suggest entailments and implications that are not warranted from the data” (Cameron and Maslen, 2010, p. 124). The researcher is encouraged to review the grouping labels and revise them where necessary, “to produce a set of groupings that better reflect the data” (p. 120). This may involve subdividing the grouping labels, as was necessary for this excerpt for the label ‘movement’, which I subsequently divided into three subgroups (table 3.8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial grouping label</th>
<th>Revised grouping label</th>
<th>Metaphor vehicle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Movement</td>
<td>Movement up</td>
<td>Throw; go up; leap; pop up; bring them up; booster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement down</td>
<td>Down; tipping point</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move (general)</td>
<td>Towards; out; on to; move that through; approach; gearing towards; channel; follow; get (something) over; tipping point; booster; jump in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.8: an example of subdividing the initial grouping labels to ensure that the labels are the best fit for the data.

3.6.1 Presenting a metaphor synthesis.
Cameron and Maslen (2010, p. 21) suggest that, once the metaphors have been identified and grouped, the researcher should construct an “interpretive synthesis”, which “covers the range of metaphors and connects them together as coherently as possible”. The metaphor synthesis that I constructed at this stage of the methodology is presented within chapter four. In line with the PAR ethos of this research project, and especially because Cameron and Maslen (2010, p. 21) describe such a synthesis as “negotiated, sometimes contested and interim”, I was keen to share the synthesis with participants at this early stage. Participants’ responses to the synthesis are articulated within table 4.2, showing their agreement with the synthesis I produced.

3.6.2 Finding systematicity in metaphor use.
The next stage in the discourse dynamics framework is to search for systematic metaphors, which are defined by Cameron and Maslen (2010, p. 127) as “a set of linguistic metaphors in which connected vehicle words or phrases are used metaphorically about a particular topic”. This allows for all the metaphors that relate to one particular topic to be gathered together into a ‘set’ known as a “systematic metaphor” (p. 128). This systematic metaphor is “a construct of the researcher, not necessarily of the participants, created to ...summarise metaphorical ways of expressing ideas, attitudes and values” (p. 128). The researcher is required to go back through the data, identifying ‘topic labels’ for the metaphors. Cameron and Maslen warn that this may not be an easy or obvious task in group discussions due to the “problem of presumed shared knowledge”, which can “make it difficult to decide on an unequivocal topic label to go with each metaphor vehicle” (p. 127).
Initially, I tried to identify topic labels on an inductive basis, but the degree of granularity at which I labelled topics on this basis meant my systematic metaphors did not illuminate much – the topics were too specific. Abandoning this attempt, I instead defined a set of “key discourse topics”, related to the research questions and to areas that I had already identified as important to the participants from the initial coding process. I followed Cameron and Maslen (2010, p. 128)’s guidance to choose these key discourse topics “with close reference to the source transcript”, and identified 10 “key discourse topics” within the initial group meeting transcripts. The key discourse topics that I decided upon were as follows:

1. Assessment and feedback practices
2. Learning and teaching (includes learning and teaching activities)
3. Awarding body (includes awarding body documentation)
4. Curriculum for Excellence
5. Institution (includes institutional processes)
6. Learners
7. Lecturers
8. Qualifications/learning programmes
9. Learners and Lecturers (specifically together)
10. People opting out of the system

Having identified the key discourse topics, I was able to start the search for systematic metaphors. Again, I drew upon the guidance provided by Cameron and Maslen (2010, p. 128), who assert that “preliminary insights and hunches …can now be investigated more rigorously”. The hunches that I had gained whilst working with the initial codes and whilst identifying metaphor vehicles and topics could now be investigated further, to support the construction of my focused codes and to provide me with a deeper insight into the participants’ attitudes, ideas and values. Chapter four discusses the results of some of these investigations.

3.7 Operationalising the Participatory Action Research methodology

Sections 3.5 – 3.6 have documented the ways in which the conceptual framework on which this research is based was developing during the data collection and initial analysis periods. Section 3.6 has documented how Cameron et al. (2009)’s discourse dynamics framework was incorporated into the research methods, in response to this developing conceptual framework. This interplay between conceptual framework and research methods is in line with Maxwell (2022, p. 6)’s assertion that “the activities of collecting and analysing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating or refocusing the research questions, and identifying and addressing validity threats are usually all going on more or less simultaneously, each influencing all of the others”.

My memo-writing from the later period of data collection and analysis reveal one example of how my concerns about validity were interlinked with the ‘activities of collecting and analysis data’. Tracey (2010)’s criteria for “excellent” (p. 837) qualitative research includes the criterion “meaningful coherence” (p. 840), which includes the study achieving “what it purports to be about” and that the study “uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goal”. Looking back at my research design, I had selected a PAR methodology and, as noted within section 3.2.2.1, I had asserted that the research ‘would fall primarily into the second-person category’ of action research, as defined by Reason and Bradbury (2011, p. 6). But, without fully acknowledging it at the time, my understanding of Marshall (2016)’s description of the participants “inquiring together…into questions or mutual concern” included that they would be working on the same thing. I had envisaged that the action research cycle would be enacted collaboratively: that in one meeting the
participants would plan to change something (together); that they would put that plan into action and observe its consequences within their individual teaching practices; that they would come back together within the next meeting to discuss and reflect on the change that they had all put into practice.

My memo-writing from that time shows my concern regarding the extent to which participants were engaged in action research, given that there seemed to be little ‘mutual’ research and an absence of ‘inquiring together’, according to my understanding of the idea. I was concerned that the individual changes in which participants were engaged were not sufficient for research which operated under the umbrella of ‘participatory action research’.

My concerns were not only centred on my interpretation of the terms, but also based on literature about validity within action research; I was concerned that the ‘action research’ element was not being operationalised appropriately. Kemmis (2006, p. 460) includes “action research conducted by people acting alone” on his list of “examples of inadequate action research”. McTaggart (1998, p. 222) asserts that the focus of participatory action research is the changes that occurred due to the “shared work” of the participants; he suggests that those reporting research using a PAR methodology need to think about “how a social practice has changed”.

As noted within my memos, I was concerned that this was not occurring within the action research meetings. There were pockets of shared action, but, as I collected and analysed the data from the action research meetings, I could see that the bulk of the changes were individual ones made within the individual practices of the participants. This placed the action research approach into the first-person category as defined by Reason and Bradbury (2011, p. 6).

However, further exploration of the literature dispelled these concerns. For example, McTaggart (1994, p. 318) asserts that each participant within a PAR project “must undertake: to improve his or her own work; to collaborate with others engaged in the project...to help them improve their work; and to collaborate with others in their own separate ...context to create the possibility of more broadly informing the common project”. The first two of these criteria – individuals improving their own work, and individuals collaborating with others to support the improvement in other people’s work - were clearly being achieved within the action research meetings. My memos include a commentary describing this process –

“Here’s another example of the participants working together asking each other for advice; DG is talking about the notes that she takes during teaching. EB wants to know how formal the notes are and how she uses them. DG provides the guidance – they’re working together; its participatory; they are learning from each other in order to improve practice”.

Furthermore, the last of these criteria was also clearly achieved within the course of the research project. As will be demonstrated within the findings chapter, the participants demonstrated that they were taking on responsibility not only for their own practice but for the practice of lecturers elsewhere within the institution. Within this, they were undertaking to “create the possibility of more broadly informing the common project” (McTaggart, 1994, p. 318), where the ‘common project’ was teaching within the institution as a whole.

This section has outlined some of the ways in which the different components of the research were simultaneously being considered, developed and adapted. The change in my understanding of how participatory action research should be operationalised was one such example, based on a continued engagement with the literature. This aligns with Maxwell (2022)’s understanding of research design within qualitative research, whereby the different components of the research
design will interact with each other throughout the research process. It also aligns with the second contributing methodology of constructivist grounded theory: Charmaz (2006, p. 165) states that “the literature review and theoretical framework can serve as valuable sources of comparison and analysis”.

3.8 Conclusions on methodology and ethical considerations
Charmaz and Thornberg (2021, p. 312) suggest that “criteria about the quality in qualitative research remain unsettled”. I was highly aware of this throughout the coding process, and wary of the risks to quality that come within the coding process, such as choosing “labels...that influence interpretation of the condensed data” (Cameron, 2010, p. 11). The metaphor analysis, which had been incorporated into the research in order to minimise ethical risks in one sense was also based on labels and research subjectivity. Given the “proactive approach” to ethical thinking that I was trying to embed within this research (as outlined in section 3.5), I was keen to mitigate these risks within this phrase of the research.

Charmaz and Thornberg (2021, p. 315)’s descriptions of the four main criteria for ensuring quality within a constructivist grounded theory methodology were used: credibility; originality; resonance; usefulness. These four main criteria were taken from Charmaz’s earlier works (2006; 2014) and elaborated on within Charmaz and Thornberg (2021). The table below, adapted from Charmaz and Thornberg (2021, p. 315) shows the ways in which I ensured that this research was meeting the quality criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for ensuring quality</th>
<th>Explanation of the criteria</th>
<th>Justification within this research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>a. “having sufficient relevant data”</td>
<td>The action research meetings took place regularly through one semester of an academic year. Many FE courses are delivered as one semester courses, meaning that participants’ thoughts were gained from throughout the teaching and assessment process (as opposed to being gathered from one limited time of year).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. “making systematic comparisons through the research process”</td>
<td>The structure of the action research methodology allowed for constant comparison of codes during the analytical process. As an additional support to ensure that the codes were consistent – and therefore to enable systematic comparisons to take pace – I asked two other doctoral students who were external to the research to review sections of the codes and data. I did this at multiple points throughout the data collection and coding process. Furthermore, my colleagues and I met to discuss why I had assigned certain phrases to certain sections of data. Justifying the use of certain codes in this way ensured consistency in the coding process, and allowed me to see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>where two codes could be merged, or needed to be separated further.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. &quot;researchers must explicate their taken-for-granted assumptions...[considering] how beliefs can enter the research process&quot;</td>
<td>Consideration of my research axiology throughout the research process shows strong reflexive focus. Furthermore, Cameron et al. (2009)’s discourse dynamics framework was used on two transcripts as an additional measure to ensure validity, and to avoid my understanding being coloured by assumptions I might have as an insider researcher.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Originality</td>
<td>a. Offering new insights; providing a fresh conceptualization of a recognised problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This research focused on teaching practitioners within an FE learning context; as explored within the literature review, there is little focus on FE within the literature. The changing wider context explored within the literature review – including the Covid-19 pandemic; the recent introduction of mandatory registration with the GTCS for college lecturers; the review of the awarding body – also ensured that this research would provide a “fresh conceptualization” of the situation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resonance</td>
<td>a. &quot;demonstrates that the researchers have constructed concepts that ...represent their research participants' experience&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At every stage in the research, I sent the participants the summaries and representations I had made of our conversations. I also ensured that the awarding body consultation responses were an accurate representation of the participants’ views. Participants were invited at every stage to comment on and make amends to the documents I produced.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Constructing concepts that &quot;provide insight to others&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As articulated within appendix D, participants were invited to share their reflections on the ways that their thinking about assessment had changed/developed after participating in the action research meetings. This reflection (done publicly, within the group meetings) allowed those listening further insight into their own/their colleagues’ experiences (but mostly their own). The participants commented frequently on the fact that they were learning from each other, and asked for guidance from each other - forming a learning community within the group. I also drew upon the support provided by two doctoral students from outside the research institution, who were able to clarify where my codes were understandable to those outside the specific research institution, and where the wording of the codes was unclear and therefore did not provide insight.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usefulness</td>
<td>&quot;clarifying participants’ understanding of their everyday lives&quot;</td>
<td>Action research and collaborative ethos allowed participants to interrogate their practices and develop their professional practices, due to an increased understanding of their situation and options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“forming a foundation for policy and practice applications”.</td>
<td>The guide to formative assessment devised and agreed by the participants during the fifth action research meetings forms a foundation for practice which may potentially influence policy and practice within the institution. The positive impact on the participants’ practice of discussing ideas, and being inspired by others to trial new ideas means that the outcomes of this research has had a practical application. This aligns with Reason and Bradbury’s (2011, p. 6) notion of second-person action research, as explored within table 3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;creating new lines of research&quot;</td>
<td>As will be discussed within chapters four, five and six, this research revealed information about practices of FE lecturers within this context. It also resulted in suggestions for new lines of research, as articulated within chapter seven.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;revealing pervasive processes and practices&quot; (pervasive means spreading widely through an area or a group of people)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This methodology chapter has aimed to provide a detailed account of the decisions that were made during the planning stages of this research, and the changes that were made during the data collection and analysis stages.

As explained within section 3.5.2, the participants’ interests did not fully align with my expectations: there was a significant interest in training and professional learning which I had not anticipated. However, given the flexible nature of both contributing methodologies, I was able to incorporate these interests and ideas into the research process. This necessitated a reconsideration of the literature. The following chapter will explore the concepts of Professional learning and Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015)’s social theory of learning that were incorporated into my conceptual framework as a result of the data collection and analysis stages.
Chapter four: the second phase literature review

This chapter outlines the second phase of the literature review, which forms part of the “stepped approach” (Straughair, 2019, p. 25) towards engaging with the literature. This second phase of the literature review focuses on the concepts which “have arisen from data analysis” (Straughair, 2019, p. 25). The written account of this second phase has been positioned here for three reasons:

1. It aims to demonstrate the researcher’s engagement with the requirements of constructivist grounded theory, in terms of Charmaz’s instructions to delay the literature review (Puddephatt, 2006, p. 6), whilst recognising that an initial engagement with the literature (as articulated within chapter two) will be unavoidable for most researchers.

2. It intends to show how the research design and researcher’s conceptual framework developed, as per Maxwell (2012, p. 6)’s assertion that “there is not an unvarying order in which the different tasks [e.g. literature review; planning the research questions]...must be arranged”. Instead, Maxwell (2012, p. 8) asserts that there will be a degree of concurrent activity within the different tasks, with “each influencing all of the others” (2012, p. 10).

3. It attempts to mitigate the issues felt by Straughair (2019, p. 26) whilst attempting to document the chronological process of conducting the initial phase literature review, then collecting and analysing data, then conducting a second phase literature review. Straughair describes how locating them in the thesis in this order “detracted from the flow of the work and also created ambiguity for the reader in terms of differentiation between existing literature and the original research findings” (2019, p. 24). In placing the second phase of the literature review here, my aim is to keep the findings and discussion (which can be found in Part B of this written thesis) separate from the account of how the conceptual framework was constructed (which can be found in Part A).

The data gathering and analysis processes introduced several key themes, as will become evident within Part B of this thesis. In terms of “topical research” (Ravitch and Riggan, 2016), the concepts of professional learning and identity were the most significant ideas to be introduced. These led to the introduction of a key theoretical framework: Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015)’s social theory of learning. These ideas will be explored within this chapter.

4.1 Professional learning

‘Professional learning’ is conceptualised in different ways within the literature. The following sections will explore some of these conceptualisations.

4.1.1 ‘Process-product’ approaches to Professional learning

The predominant conceptualisation of teacher PL within the literature is based on a “cause-and-effect” or “process-product” approach (Opfer and Pedder, 2011, p. 377). Such a conceptualisation focuses on “specific activities, processes or programmes in isolation from the complex teaching and learning environments in which teachers live” (Opfer and Pedder, 2011, p. 377). Sherman and Teemant (2020)’s understanding of PL suggests that that this conceptualisation, taken from the literature from over a decade ago, is still relevant today; Sherman and Teemant suggest that approaches to teacher professional development (PD) tend to follow a “linear, hierarchical, causal mono-logic model” (p. 363) which isolates “critical features of effective PD” (p. 363) and assumes that these features alone can produce effective teacher professional development opportunities. According to Sherman and Teemant, such research “entail(s) an implied or explicit binary dualism” (p. 372), and assumes that “the rest of the school reality...can be dismissed as stage, substrate or incidental” (p. 364).
This conceptualisation aligns with Adams’ (2017) description of PL which focuses on teachers as individuals, and is based on “a training or deficit model” (p. 162). Describing an “era of accountability” (p. 168) for educational professionals, Adams places this model of PL within an educational culture “within which teachers and schools are constantly measured and ranked” (2017, p. 163). Ball (2003) describes how, within this educational culture, teachers are encouraged to “add value’ to themselves, [and] improve their productivity” (p. 217); Kennedy et al. (2008, p. 402) describe how teachers are required to “account for their competence against individual standards”. Kennedy et al. (2008) use the phrase “accountability agenda” here, which chimes with Adams’ “era of accountability”, above. With implications for ideas of professional agency, Ball (2003, p. 226) notes that, within this context, “professional judgement is subordinated to the requirements of performativity” (p. 226).

Opfer and Pedder (2011, p. 376) suggest that this binary or ‘process-product’ approach is inappropriate – and will not result in effective PL opportunities for teachers. They suggest that research which employs such “simplistic conceptualisations of teacher professional learning … fail to consider how learning is embedded in professional lives and working conditions”.

4.1.2 Professional learning as ‘identity work’

An alternative conceptualisation of PL views learning as “identity work” (Vinson et al. (2022, p. 2). This conceptualisation is based on Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015)’s “social theory of learning” (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 139), which views learning as a “process of identity formation” (Omidvar and Kislov, 2014, p. 267). Identity formation, according to Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) “does not rest with the individual, but is a social process” (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 140). Within this theory of learning, learning takes place within a Community of Practice (CoP) – defined as a “community with a joint enterprise, shared repertoire and mutual engagement” (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 143, drawing on Wenger, 1998, p. 73). Emphasis is placed on the ‘social’ aspects of the process: a CoP can also be defined as “a social process of negotiating competence in a domain over time” (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p.143), where a ‘domain’ is defined as “the area in which a community claims to have legitimacy to define competence” (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 143). PL is seen not as something that a practitioner or professional does, but in the ways that the individual engages and aligns with the community’s understanding of ‘competence’. Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015, p. 14) describe how “one could in fact define a responsible practitioner as someone whose experience in providing a service reflects the current competence of a community”; being part of a CoP allows professionals to feel that they are part of an appreciated, professional community (Lee-Kelley et al., 2014), offering “opportunities for individual growth and development” (De Waal and Khumisi, 2016, p. 70). For Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015, p. 19), the concepts of PL and identity are closely linked, given that “learning is not merely the acquisition of knowledge. It is the becoming of a person who inhabits the landscape with an identity whose dynamic construction reflects our trajectory through that landscape”.

Omidvar and Kislov (2014, p. 266) note that this theory of learning has been subject to “continuous expansion and development” since its introduction in 1991. One such development was the shift from a focus on “internal processes within individual communities” (Omidvar and Kislov, 2014, p. 267) towards consideration of the “complex system of communities of practice” (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015, p. 13) which make up a professional occupation. Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015, p. 13) use the metaphor of a ‘landscape’ of practice to describe professional occupations, suggesting that “the social ‘body of knowledge’ of a profession is best understood as a ‘landscape of practice’ consisting of a complex system of communities of practice and the boundaries between them”.
Within this conceptualisation of PL as ‘identity work’, a practitioner’s “trajectory through that landscape” (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015, p. 19) must be viewed at two different levels. Firstly, practitioners belong to a specific community of practice, in which they align (or do not align) with that community’s understanding of professional competence. Secondly, that community of practice is itself part of a landscape of multiple communities of practice, including those involved in the practicing of the occupation, and those engaged in “research, teaching, management, regulations” (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015, p. 15). When interacting with the wider landscape, practitioners move beyond the idea of ‘competence’ to the concept of ‘knowledgeability’, defined by Wenger-Trayner as “the state of the person with respect to the landscape” (Omidvar and Kislov, 2014, p. 270). Practitioners working within a landscape of practice “need to know something about a lot of practices in which you have no membership and in which you have no claim to competence” (Omidvar and Kislov, 2014, p. 270). In terms of PL, it is “very important to have both competence and knowledgeability in balance” (Omidvar and Kislov, 2014, p. 271); those who have little understanding of the wider landscape of practice – those who do not have ‘knowledgeability’ – “have little ability...to contribute to the learning capability of the broader system” (Omidvar and Kislov, 2014, p. 271).

The expansion of this social theory of learning to include the concept of landscapes of practice brings two interesting points to note. For Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015, p. 15), “all these practices have their own histories...and regimes of competence”, which have “competing voices and competing claims to knowledge”, and can, to different extents, “influence the landscape through the legitimacy of their discourse”. A landscape of practice is therefore a political one, leading to “knowledge hierarchies” (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015, p. 16) between practices within the landscape. The impact of this on lecturers within the Scottish FE context will be discussed within section 4.2.

4.1.3 Professional learning through collaboration and community

There is evidence to suggest that the conceptualisation of PL explored within section 4.1.2 is becoming more dominant within the literature – for example, Loughland and Nguyen (2020, p. 147) suggest that there has been a recent “shift” within the literature on teacher PL, from a consideration of individual “design elements” to a focus on “action that integrates and drives these disparate elements”. The ‘disparate elements’ here correspond to the “complex landscape of different communities of practice” articulated by Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015, p. 15). Elsewhere within the literature, Opfer and Peddler (2011, p. 378) assert that “teacher learning must be conceptualized as a complex system rather than an event”, which again echoes the complexity emphasised within Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015)’s conceptualisation of landscapes of practice.

Within the recent literature relating to PL, there is also an emphasis on collaboration and community to create the conditions for effective PL. This emphasis is implicit within Stoll and Kools (2017, p. 10)’s discussion of the difference between information and knowledge – they emphasise the importance of dialogue between members of a community, asserting that “while many are seduced into treating information as knowledge, it is not; social processing brings information to life”. Husband (2018)’s research into the experiences of lecturers accessing PL in the Scottish and Welsh FE contexts conclude with the assertion that “professional learning comes through immersion in practice and community”, again emphasising the importance of collaboration between colleagues. Furthermore, Husband suggests that PL takes place where colleagues can engage in “witnessing, participating and enacting the role [of lecturer]”.

In forming these conclusions, Husband (2018) also draws on the work of Eraut (2004, p. 266), who suggests that “working alongside others allows people to observe and listen to others at work and to
participate in activities, and hence to learn some new practices...”. Husband (2018, p. 163) suggests that Eraut refers to “busy working environments” which invite “opportunities for informal learning to occur through contact with (often) more experienced peers”. Husband here interprets Eraut’s reference to ‘contact’ as the contact which comes from face-to-face working environments.

These two more recent conceptualisations of PL, outlined within sections 4.1.2 and 4.1.3 emphasise the importance of context. For example, Opfer and Pedder (2011, p. 377) state that PL is “contextually situated”; drawing on “socioculturally informed research”, Jurasaitė-Harbison and Rex (2010, p. 268) state that “professional learning... is contextually situated and intrinsic to the contexts within which and with which the individual interacts”. An understanding of the context in which this research is set is therefore clearly required; the next section of this literature review will provide further contextual details regarding the Scottish FE context, building on the contextual information provided within the opening chapter of this thesis.

4.2 Viewing the Scottish FE context through the ‘social theory of learning’.

Given the conceptualisation of PL as “identity work” (Vinson et al., 2022, p. 2) (see section 4.1.2, above) which views learning as “a process of identity formation” (Omidvar and Kislov, 2014, p. 267), it is appropriate to start this section with a consideration of professional identity for those working within the FE context. Within FE institutions, the role and expectations of lecturers is less clearly defined compared to that of educators within the compulsory sector (Spenceley, 2011). Turner et al. (2009) suggest that FE lecturers are required to teach across a range of subject areas and at a range of levels, which may demand different teaching styles and use different assessment mechanisms. The consequences of this include that the creation of an identity as a teacher is a challenge. Robson (1998) emphasises the gravity of this, describing the FE sector as in “crisis” (p. 585), due, in part to the fact that the “professional group” of lecturers within the FE sector is “struggling to develop any sense of its own collective status or identity” (p. 602).

Furthermore, unlike within the compulsory sector, an identity as a ‘teacher’ is not necessarily central to lecturers’ identities. Whilst Tyler and Dymcock (2021, p. 12) suggest that “high school teachers...have content expertise but arguably see themselves primarily as educators”, Springbett (2018, p. 150), suggests that FE lecturers are often “appointed for their industrial rather than teaching expertise”. According to Spenceley (2011, p. 412), it is this subject mastery, “not pedagogic and technical knowledge of teaching and learning” which is the “foundation” of the identities of those teaching within this sector. Spenceley’s focus is on the lifelong learning sector (LLS) in England, but her discussion of reflective practice as a method of developing the capacities of FE teachers is relevant to the situations faced by lecturers more widely across the UK. Elsewhere within the literature, Chowdry (2014, p. 555) refers to the “unique new professional identity” which is created when FE lecturers “draw on both their original professional identities along with a lecturing identity”.

Using Wenger’s social theory of learning as outlined within section 4.1.2, we can suggest that PL within the FE context should be distinguished from PL in the compulsory (primary and secondary) contexts. The literature suggests that teachers in the secondary context do form CoPs (e.g. Brouwer et al., 2012) and are therefore able to engage in PL according to the model put forward by Wenger (1998). By contrast, the differences in identity felt by lecturers suggests that lecturers may struggle to form CoPs, given that the term CoP “refers to a social process negotiating competence in a domain over time” (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 143). ‘Domain’ defines “the area in which a community claims to have legitimacy to define competence” (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 143). For lecturers within the FE context, “the notion of being a professional is less clear” (Tyler and Dymcock,
lecturers “tend to enter the profession already equipped with a professional identity”, meaning that the domain(s) in which lecturers feel they have competence will differ between individuals, depending on their ‘other’ professional identity. The extent to which lecturers within the FE context can establish a “joint enterprise” (Wenger, 1998, p. 77) may therefore be reduced.

The landscape of practice for lecturers within the FE context also differs from that of teachers within the compulsory sector. One example of this can be seen in terms of the variety in learner profiles within the FE context, as shown within figure 4.1 (below), which depicts the variety in student population within FE colleges in Scotland.

Although it is unclear whether the size of the font within this infographic is proportional to the size of each of these populations, this visual representation clearly underlines the diversity of students in terms of age and employment status. More importantly for this discussion, it also provides an indication of the number of different communities of practice within the FE landscape of practice: given the presence of secondary school and primary school pupils within the student population, we can infer that the FE landscape of practice includes secondary school and primary school-based CoPs. Similarly, the inclusion of employer training courses within this infographic suggests that the FE landscape of practice must count employers within its multiple communities, and the inclusion of modern apprentices dictates that Skills Development Scotland (SDS), an organisation dedicated to the development of skills in Scotland, is also included within the landscape of practice.

For Wenger-Trayner, a landscape of practice made up of multiple communities “in which you have very, very thin membership” (Omidvar and Kislov, 2014, p. 271) poses particular problems, due to the fact that “the definition of what counts as knowledgeability cannot be achieved by a given community” (Omidvar and Kislov, 2014, p. 271). Given that without knowledgeability, individuals are not able “to contribute to the learning capability of the broader system” (Omidvar and Kislov, 2014, p. 271), it is appropriate to consider the ways in which the increased size of the landscape of
practice within the FE context, compared to that of the primary or secondary context, may impact upon learning and professional identity.

Furthermore, considering the current conceptualisations of PL as collaborative and based on communication, it could be suggested that the Covid-19 pandemic and its after-effects have had, and will continue to have, an impact on the extent to which lecturers can engage in PL. The direction of travel for the sector at the time of writing is uncertain: it is “difficult to say” how much “the relative explosion of technology in FE” (Collab Group, 2020) due to the Covid-19 pandemic will be retained in future academic sessions, and to what extent learning and teaching will move into online contexts. But it should be noted that even after lockdown rules for the FE sector allowed for a return to face-to-face teaching, “the extent to which [FE] providers [in England] were using digital learning varied” (Department for Education, Training and Skills, 2022). If we also include those institutions that were already adopting a hybrid delivery model, and those who had “shifted entirely to digital learning”, it is clear that the working conditions for lecturers within FE have shifted to include at least an element of online.

4.3 Professional Learning within the Scottish context

4.3.1 Professional learning within Scottish education: Donaldson (2011).

One of the significant milestones with Scottish PL policy was the publication of a report entitled ‘Teaching Scotland’s Future’ Donaldson (2011), also referred to as the ‘Donaldson Report’. This publication was the outcome of a “fundamental review of teacher education in Scotland” (Donaldson, 2011, p. iii). Black et al. (2016, p. 6)’s evaluation of the impact of Donaldson (2011) concluded that there had been “a significant shift in the culture of professional learning” due to the recommendations published within the report; Donaldson (2014, p. 181) notes that “the Scottish Government accepted almost all of the recommendations in full and the rest in part or in principle”. Indeed, the report was “broadly welcomed by all stakeholders involved in teacher education” (Kennedy and Doherty, 2012, p. 836). Black et al. (2016, p. 6) assert that, as a consequence of the report, teachers were “more engaged with professional learning”; that the impact of professional learning on pupils was more likely to be considered; that teachers engage “in professional dialogue more often” and that teachers demonstrated “a greater willingness to try new approaches” (Black et al., 2016, p. 6). This report is therefore worth exploring within this consideration of teacher PL in the Scottish context.

Drawing on literature, Beck and Adams (2020, p. 68) suggest that there was a “lack of clarity around what actually led to the Review’s establishment”; they suggest that the Scottish Government’s commissioning of the report implies that “prior provision [of teacher education/professional learning] was deemed inadequate”. The report was deemed “unusual” (Beck and Adams, 2020, p. 69) due to its remit that “covered the entirety of teacher education for primary and secondary schooling” (Donaldson, 2011, p. iii), and also due to its “consultative approach” (Beck and Adams, 2020, p. 69) which included “a teacher survey (2,381 responses); meetings with stakeholders; and, meetings with individuals and organisations across Scotland and internationally”.

There are four specific aspects of the report which are worth noting for this research. The first is the emphasis within the report placed on value of “site-based” (Donaldson, 2011, p. 65) CPD as opposed to “external courses” (p. 9). Donaldson emphasises that CPD activity should “fit(s) with an existing school culture and ethos” (p. 64), and asserts that “external courses should form only a small part of an overall CPD strategy” (p. 9), explaining that “the impact of one-off courses or events, however stimulating, tends to dissipate on return to the realities of the classroom” (p. 9). Instead, Donaldson advocates for PL that is “local, collegiate, relevant and sustained” (p. 9). This aligns with
the wider literature explored within section 4.1.3, for example in terms of Opfer and Pedder (2011, p. 377)’s reference to PL as “contextually situated”. It suggests that the report and its recommendations were in line with other developments happening within the literature on PL.

As well as an emphasis on context, Donaldson (2011) emphasises the importance of partnership and networking for effective PL. Donaldson (2011, p. 103)’s recommendations were designed with the “aim to entrench the interconnections between schools, universities and other agencies”. There is specific reference to the “danger” for teachers who are unable to engage in partnerships and networking – that “without some form of external stimulus, the horizons of groups of teachers may be too narrow” (Donaldson, 2011, p. 9). Here, we can suggest that Donaldson (2011) aligns with Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015, p. 15)’s “complex landscape of different communities of practice… [including] research, teaching, management, regulation…”. Donaldson (2011, p. 15) refers to the movement of “each individual teacher’s responsibility beyond the individual classroom outwards into the school, to teacher education and the profession as a whole”. In this way, engagement with the landscape of practice is emphasised over engagement with a community of practice of teachers themselves; there is an emphasis on ‘knowledgeability’ rather than ‘competence’.

Furthermore, Donaldson (2011, p. 105) emphasises the “twenty-first century professionalism” which is “central to his vision of teacher education for the future” (Kennedy and Doherty, 2012, p. 838). Donaldson (2011, p. 15) outlines the “much wider concept of teacher professionalism”, which sees teachers going “beyond recreating the best of current or past practice” (p. 14); teachers are required to “understand the broader context within which they are working” (p. 18) and “must be able to engage directly and willingly with the change process” (p. 18).

Criticisms of this aspect of Donaldson (2011) include that there is a lack of clarity regarding the concept of ‘professionalism’. As noted by Kennedy and Doherty (2012, p. 840), the term ‘professionalism’ is “not defined explicitly”, although Donaldson’s use of the term implies that teacher professionalism “needs to be enhanced, reinvigorated, widened” (Kennedy and Doherty, 2012, p. 840). However, using Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015)’s social theory of learning as a theoretical framework (see section 4.1.2), it can be suggested that Donaldson (2011)’s concept of professionalism emphasises the importance of teachers engaging within the landscape of practice. Within his discussion of the recommendations within the context of Scottish curriculum change, Donaldson (2014) comments that the report “envisages a profession which is directly engaged in shaping as well as delivering necessary educational change and improvement”. This vision of professionalism aligns with Kennedy (2005)’s model of transformative professional learning, as will be discussed within section 4.4.

Arguably the biggest impact of Donaldson (2011) relates to the recommendation for a set of professional standards, named by Donaldson as the “Standard for Active Registration” (2011, p. 9). According to Adams and Mann (2021, p. 595) these were the “catalyst for the introduction of a career-wide reaccreditation scheme known as Professional Update (PU)”. At the time that it was introduced, this reaccreditation scheme applied just to teachers in the compulsory context in Scotland, requiring them to engage in self-evaluation against the appropriate standards on an “ongoing” (GTCS, no date-b.) basis, and requiring them to maintain “a reflective professional learning record and associated evidence of impact” (GTCS, no date-b).

Adams and Mann (2021, p. 595) describe PU as having “two functions”. Firstly, it formalises the requirement for teachers to engage in PL, ensuring that they have annual meetings with their line manager. Secondly, it “serves as a reaccreditation process” (Adams and Mann, 2021, p. 595). For Adams and Mann (2021, p. 596) there are “potential tensions” between these two functions: on the
one hand, teachers are required to engage in PL which emphasises reflection as a means to support development and practice (see the references to reflection within the Professional Standards (GTCS, 2020); on the other, the reaccreditation process requires teachers to evidence their learning, leading to a situation whereby “teachers...may end up undertaking activities that can be easily evidenced rather than genuine learning experiences” (Adams and Mann, 2021, p. 596). Adams and Mann (2021, p. 602) summarise the policies relating to PL in Scotland as having “two conflicting stances”, one which aligns with concepts of PL as collaborative and reflective, the other focusing on “individual accountability and compliance” (Adams and Mann, 2021, p. 602). This second stance aligns with the ideas in 4.1.2 – the ‘process-product’ approach to PL.

4.3.2 Current guidance relating to Professional Learning within Scotland
Current guidance relating to PL within Scotland comes from two key sources: Education Scotland, and the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS).

Education Scotland is a “Scottish Government executive agency” (Education Scotland, 2023) with responsibility for “supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education”. Within this remit, their ‘National Model of Professional Learning’ is available as a “model designed to support education professionals to grow professionally and seek improvement in their practice”, along with “a range of practical tools to support education professionals” (Education Scotland, 2021). Figure 4.2 (below) shows the main visual representation of this ‘national model’.

![Figure 4.2 National Model of Professional Learning (Education Scotland, 2022)](image)

This model incorporates aspects of the different conceptualisations of PL outlined within section 4.1. For example, the “three inter-connected areas of practice” (Education Scotland, 2021) displayed in green within the model, show an emphasis on collaboration, as explored within 4.1.3. The reference
to the professional standards, displayed within the light blue, suggest an emphasis on contextual factors. The reference to “learning that deepens knowledge and understanding” could be perceived as linking to the “deficit model” outlined within 4.1.1 This model suggests a complexity to the concept of PL within the Scottish context.

A third area worthy of discussion within the national model of PL is ‘learning by enquiring’. This aligns with the GTCS (no date.b)’s definition of PL, which asserts that practitioners take an “enquiring stance” (p. 3) regarding their practice, and ask “critical questions of policy and practice” (p.1). The GTCS have as their “mission” to “maintain the integrity of registration and regulation of the teaching profession…and to enhance teaching professionalism at an individual group and system level” (GTCS, no date-c); this emphasis on enquiry, which aligns with the aims of Education Scotland, suggests that professional enquiry as a means of learning is embedded into the macro context.

4.4 Implications for the Scottish FE context.
Kennedy (2022) suggests that PL in “now well-embedded in the policy landscape” in Scotland, thanks in part to Donaldson (2011). It is credited with outlining a “vision” (Black et al., 2016, p. 91) for teacher PL, which put the profession “on the path” – but, in 2016, the profession was “not there yet”. Recent literature which draws on Donaldson (2011) focuses primarily on the use of standards to shape PL (e.g. Kennedy, 2024; Adams and Mann, 2021). Other recent literature related to Donaldson (2011) focuses on ideas such as teachers as leaders of educational change (e.g. Beck, 2024) and PL as partnership (e.g. Bain et al., 2017). These last two ideas will be discussed in terms of their relevance to the FE context within the findings and discussion chapters.

Of note within this chapter, however, is that the Professional Update (PU) reaccreditation process was, in 2018, extended to lecturers within the Scottish FE context. This is noteworthy because, as suggested above, the “catalyst” (Adams and Mann, 2022, p. 595) for the PU process was the Donaldson report (2011), yet there is no specific reference to the professional learning of lecturers within the FE context within the report itself. Within the report, Donaldson (2011, p. iii) emphasises the remit of his review through the repetition of the phrase “the entirety of teacher education”, qualifying this with the phrase “for primary and secondary schooling”; given the absence of references to lecturers within the FE context, the extent to which the recommendations are relevant to PL for lecturers within the FE context could be questioned.

However, as noted within section 4.2, the FE context shares some similarities with the primary and/or secondary contexts: the Curriculum for Excellence, for example, can be applied to some learners within the FE context as well as the primary and secondary contexts; some qualifications are relevant to both FE and secondary contexts. It is not unreasonable to expect some parallels in the needs of educators within any educational context. A critical reading of Donaldson (2011) suggests that it is not necessarily irrelevant to the professional learning of lecturers within the FE context.

For example, there are parallels in terms of the ‘vision’ for PL within the FE and compulsory primary and/or secondary contexts. As discussed within section 4.3.1, above, implicit within Donaldson (2011) is an aim for PL to be ‘transformative’; such an aim is explicitly noted within Bain et al. (2019, p. 6)’s discussion of the Teaching Qualification in Further Education (TQFE), which is the standard qualification requirement for lecturers to register with the GTCS (GTCS, no date-e.). These similarities in vision suggest that some aspects of Donaldson (2011) could be applied to lecturers within the FE context.

Another similarity between Donaldson (2011) and the discourse surrounding PL for lecturers within the FE context relates to the concept of professionalism. As discussed above, ‘teacher
professionalism’ is not explicitly defined within Donaldson (2011), rendering it difficult to critically engage with this idea. It is interesting to note that there is a similar silence surrounding professionalism for lecturers within the FE context; the rationale for lecturer registration, according to the GTCS (2023) is that “registration...provides a supportive framework for enhancing lecturer professionalism”, with little further comment as to what that means. The concept of professionalism is central to both Donaldson (2011) and the contractual changes made regarding lecturer registration, yet there is silence for both regarding the specifics of what this entails.

However, the application of recommendations that were borne out of one context (primary and secondary education) to another (further education) requires caution; it cannot be assumed that the recommendations will necessarily be relevant and applicable to the new context. Within this chapter, it has been argued both that PL is “contextually situated” (Opfer and Pedder, 2011, p. 377) and that the FE context is different from that of the compulsory education context in Scotland (see section 4.2). Given the absence of any specific reference to the FE context within the Donaldson report, it could be argued that the introduction of the Professional Update scheme, with its implications for PL processes, into the FE context is problematic, in part due to the fact that it does not consider issues from the perspective of lecturers within FE. The findings and discussion chapters which follow this second-phase literature review will explore PL from the perspective of lecturers within the FE context.

4.5 Assessment as a ‘boundary encounter’

The introduction of Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015)’s social theory of learning into this research also has implications for the way in which assessment is conceptualised. If, as explored within chapter two, assessments are defined not simply in terms of their ‘type’, but also in terms of how they are used, we can describe assessment practices as “boundary encounters” (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015, p. 17) within the landscape of practice. Wenger-Trayner et al. use the term ‘boundary encounters’ to describe the places at which different practices meet. For example, a given assessment may be used by the awarding body as a summative evaluation of a learner’s progress; used as an evaluation of a lecturer’s competence by an institutional management team; used by a lecturer as an opportunity to inform subsequent teaching plans. Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015, p. 17) explain how boundaries are “places of potential misunderstanding and confusion” where “even common words and objects are not guaranteed to have continuity of meaning”.

4.6 Chapter four conclusion: building my conceptual framework.

Ravitch and Riggan (2016, p. 32) suggest that one function of an effective literature review is to support the researcher to “understand the conversations already happening within and across relevant fields”. The “initial phase literature review” (Straughair, 2019, p. 5) in which the area of investigation is contextualised (Straughair, 2019), focused on developing my understanding of “the existing theoretical conversations” (Straughair, 2019, p. 3) surrounding the FE context and concepts of assessment. This part of the literature review can be found within chapter two of this thesis, with relevant ideas from the literature incorporated into figure 2.3. Within this fourth chapter, “unpredicted, concepts that have emerged from data analysis” (Straughair, 2019, p. 3) have been explored, developing my understanding of the literature related to PL and its relevance to the current FE context, and introducing the social theory of learning (Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015) which positions PL as ‘identity work’. Figure 4.3 shows how these areas of the literature were incorporated into my conceptual framework.
Figure 4.3 Constructing my conceptual framework – stage 3. Adapted from Ravitch and Riggan (2016).
As articulated by Birks and Mills (2015, p. 21), “in most studies, the research question directs how
the study proceeds. In grounded theory it is the research process that generates the question”. Aligning
with the requirements of the grounded theory methodology meant that it was not until the
data collection and analysis period had started that I was able to integrate these areas into my
conceptual framework, and subsequently finalise the research aim and research questions. This
aligned also with the other contributing methodology – participatory action research (PAR) – which
differs from other research methodologies in terms of the extent to which the participants are
involved in the design of the research purpose, the hypotheses (if appropriate) and the research
questions themselves (Johnson, 2017, p.4). The research questions with which I had started this
research therefore required amending; the previous versions of the research questions had to be
viewed as evolving drafts. I was conscious that insisting on the previous versions of my research
questions against the judgement of the participants would be contrary to the methodology I had
chosen.

It was therefore only once these areas had been integrated into my conceptual framework that I was
able to finalise the research aim and research questions, which are articulated as follows:

**AIM:** This qualitative study seeks to explain the factors which have an impact on lecturers’
professional learning in an FE context, using assessment as a lens through which to view practice.

- **Research Question (RQ) one:** what factors have an impact on lecturers’ professional
  learning, in a further education (FE) learning context?
- **Research Question two:** how do these factors impact on lecturers’ implementation and
devolution of assessment practices, in a further education (FE) learning context?
- **Research Question three:** to what extent can an action research methodology contribute to
  professional learning practices, in a further education (FE) learning context?
Part B

Chapter five: Findings

5.1 Exploring the findings

This chapter presents the findings that were constructed from during the concurrent data collection and analysis periods, and which constitute the researcher’s interpretation of the ways in which the participants within this study view their professional practice. The primary data analysis method used to construct these findings was constructivist grounded theory; the categories, focused codes and initial codes constructed from this analysis will be discussed in section 5.1.1. As explained within chapter three (methodology), a metaphor analysis was also conducted on a small section of the collected data, as a means of validating the findings constructed from the CGT analysis, and as a means of mitigating the threats to validity which are associated with insider-research such as this. This metaphor analysis will be explored within section 5.1.2. The remaining sections within this chapter will then explore how these findings relate to the research questions, which are phrased as follows:

- **Research Question (RQ) one**: what factors have an impact on lecturers’ professional learning, in a further education (FE) learning context?
• **Research Question two**: how do these factors impact on lecturers’ implementation and development of assessment practices, in a further education (FE) learning context?

• **Research Question three**: to what extent can an action research methodology contribute to professional learning practices in a further education (FE) learning context?

5.1.1 Categories constructed through constructivist grounded theory (CGT).

This section will explore the categories which were constructed through the CGT analysis of the AR meeting transcripts. A full list of categories, focused codes and initial codes can be found as a table in Appendix I. These categories and the codes will then be explored within reference to the research questions in chapter five.

5.1.1.1 Category one: ‘serving multiple stakeholders’.

The category ‘serving multiple stakeholders’ is made up of four focused codes: 1) ‘multiple requirements within lecturers’ role’, 2) ‘lack of coherence between systems’, 3) ‘assessment to the detriment of learning’ and 4) ‘tension between curriculum and FE practice’. The initial codes from which these focused codes were constructed are demonstrated within figure 5.1 (below).
Participants discussed the wide-ranging requirements of the lecturing role in Further Education, and the difficulties they had in juggling these requirements. At a basic level, one participant explained how:

“And people who are teaching – lecturers - that includes maybe people who are teaching leisure courses; ...people who are teaching entirely HNC; people who are teaching entirely FE - a whole mishmash of things.”

The impact of this ‘mishmash’ meant that lecturers may have to alter their teaching style – often within the course of one day - depending on the different assessment mechanisms between courses. One participant explained:
“if we’re teaching a course which has a lot of unseen exams, then the kind of formative assessment we’re doing is very different to the kinds of assessment we would be doing and feedback if it was a very different summative assessment because you’ve obviously got to prepare people for the assessment at the end of the day”.

Some of the initial codes within this focused code related to the different outcomes towards which students were working, and the impact of this on the role of the lecturer. For example, participants discussed the tension between the need to prepare students for success at FE, with its pass/fail assessment mechanism, and the simultaneous requirement to prepare students for study at HE, where they will be assessed through a grading system. The participants discussed how the paperwork for FE programmes “limits” lecturers’ thinking in this respect, as shown within this quotation:

“you’re not thinking about so much of how to improve [the students]. It’s just a case of, oh, well done, you’ve passed this. Whereas when you’ve got a grade system you’ve got an indication of what level you’re working to”.

This comment summarises the tension perceived by lecturers about their role, caused by the multiple requirements placed on lecturers within the Further Education context.

5.1.1.1.2 Focused code two: ‘lack of coherence between systems’

During the group discussions, the participants identified multiple agencies, organisations and systems involved in the FE context. These included the Curriculum for Excellence, the SQA (the main awarding body for Scottish FE institutions), other external agencies, universities and employers. Focused code two, although not made up on many initial codes (as shown within figure 5.1), was a real focus for the participants; participants believed that there was a lack of coherence between the demands of these agencies, organisations and systems. Participants discussed the difficulties that this caused them, in terms of the extent to which they could align their teaching practice with the requirements of the different organisations. Whilst discussing some development work within a specific curriculum area, one participant explained:

“we would sit in one meeting with one EV [External Verifier] and they would say one thing, telling us that we should be doing this and this the way forward and ‘we want to get your ideas’. And then we sat in the meeting with somebody else who said ‘Oh, no, no, no, that’s not what we’re looking for’. And it was one of the most stressful things I’ve ever been through.”

For participants, this lack of coherence was not just problematic for their professional practice, but they considered it to be detrimental to their learners as well. For example, participants were adamant that the awarding body requirements did not support their learners to meaningfully progress to work or to further study – due to a lack of coherence in terms of overall aim. Establishing that the awarding body had a rigid and prescriptive set of assessment aims as its focus, one participant explained:

“the world of work is not driven by assessment, it’s driven by motivation, attendance. All these kinds of things that don’t currently sit with the pattern of assessment criteria”.

For the participants within this study, this lack of coherence caused serious problems relating to learners’ progression beyond the FE learning context. The participants’ incredulity was summarised by one participant:
“is it not a bit ridiculous and bizarre that the SQA system is not compatible with the requirements of university?”

5.1.1.3 Focused code three: ‘assessment to the detriment of learning’
Focused code three relates to the belief that seemed to be shared by all participants: they not only believed that the assessment requirements of the awarding body do not support progression, but that the assessment requirements were detrimental to their learners’ progression. The initial code ‘pass/fail mechanism unhelpful to learners’ illuminates this belief; participants commented as follows:

“I think this has huge implications when people are moving on, because people assume ‘I’ve passed and therefore I’m able’. But actually, depending on where you’re sitting in a class really indicates whether you’re able or not”.

“So how do students as learners really know where they’re sitting?”

“Actually some people might be scraping a pass and the struggle for them is really real when they move on to progress”.

Participants expressed an underlying belief that there were “simply too many summative assessments” within the courses that they delivered at FE level. They believed that the number of summative assessments had a detrimental impact on their learners:

“... they’re stressed and overwhelmed and anxious about knowing that everything’s a summative assessment. Then they close down, and that just makes sense to be honest because they’re overwhelmed; people shut down when they’re overwhelmed”.

Participants also discussed the impact of the high summative assessment requirements on the lecturers:

“you just feel that the pressure is always on, to ensure that there’s 100% pass across all of the expected outcomes”.

This focused code did not just relate to the emotional toll on lecturers of the high summative assessment requirements. Participants also explained how the focus on summative assessment prevented good teaching practice; one participant explained that “there wasn’t a time to kind of reflect with them about anything” due to the need to move on to the next assessment. Another discussed the negative impact on the “rubbish quality of the materials you have time to produce, because you have to spend all your time on assessment instruments”. One participant expressed it as follows:

“And it can be a detriment to the actual ability to do things like formative to assess the learning and to, to build upon the knowledge and through learning and teaching techniques that are sometimes lost in the drowning amount of summative assessment”.

Participants were unanimous in their belief that fewer summative assessment requirements would result in benefits for their learners. One participant explained how “you get much more from students when students have less assessment and more opportunity to really explore. You get much more from that – you get more engagement, you get more back, because they’re enthused to learn what they’re learning”. The tension articulated here was in terms of what they thought their
practice should result in (i.e engaging learners; enthusing learners; reflecting with learners; building learners’ knowledge) and the reality of their practice with its focus on summative assessment.

5.1.1.4 Focused code four: ‘tension between curriculum and FE practice’.
The participants identified a specific tension between the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and the FE context in which this research was located. Participants were unanimous in their view that “the principles and vision of the CfE reflect what matters for education in theory”. However, they were also unanimous in their belief that “the CfE does not work in practice”. As explained by one participant:

“Ok, so we’ve changed the curriculum, but we haven’t changed the ethos of education. We’ve got this curriculum, which we’ve put on top of an old model of education. And it doesn’t work. Because what we needed to do was not only overhaul the curriculum but overhaul the lot of it”.

Participants expressed their understanding of the aims of the curriculum – “it was about creating well rounded individuals”. They also expressed their understanding of the ways in which the demands of the awarding body were not aligned with these aims – “we’re still doing standardised tests to see where they’re at”.

Participants expressed their belief that aspects of the curriculum were not embedded – or even apparent – within the FE learning context.

“Because if you look at the capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence ... where they are in the delivery, assessment, feedback and just general courses within senior phase – they’re not there”.

“I think the real key part is these four cornerstones of the Curriculum for Excellence, and as [participant] quite rightly says – where are they?”

For participants, the fact that the capacities of the CfE are not embedded within the FE delivery restricted their practice. As one participant explained:

“you’re not asked to consider those things - assessment and feedback and whatever else and the whole process - then, okay, how can you possibly be expected to embed that?”

5.1.1.5 Summary: Serving multiple stakeholders
The category ‘serving multiple stakeholders’ reflects the participants’ perceptions of dissonance between the multiple stakeholders within the FE context, and the difficulties that they have in meeting the requirements of these stakeholders within their FE lecturer role. Participants specifically referred to the distance between the aims of the Curriculum for Excellence – of which they were broadly supportive – and the requirements of other aspects of their teaching practice, for example the awarding body and other agencies involved in FE provision. Participants highlighted examples of tension caused by this dissonance – including their perceptions that some assessment practices were detrimental to learners.

5.1.1.2 Category two: ‘isolated practice’.
Category two reveals the ways in which participants consider themselves to be isolated from other stakeholders within the FE context. It is made up of five focused codes: 1) ‘unshared perspectives’, 2) ‘lack of trust in awarding body’, 3) ‘working without clarity’, 4) ‘inconsistent support’, and 5) ‘limited trust in institution’. The first three of these focused codes centre upon the distance lecturers feel from the awarding body primarily; the fourth and fifth centre mostly upon the isolation
participants feel from their institution. The initial codes from which this category was constructed are shown within figure 5.2 (below).

Figure 5.2: the initial and focused codes from which category two was constructed

5.1.2.1 Focused code one: ‘unshared perspectives’
This focused code reveals participants’ sense of disconnect between the way in which they consider their teaching practice, and the perspectives of a) the SQA and b) the learners themselves. With reference specifically to formative assessment – which, as articulated in section 5.1.1, above, participants consider to be an important tool for evaluating their own teaching practice and evaluating their learners’ progress - participants discussed their belief that the awarding body does not value formative assessment. One participant stated:

“SQA aren’t interested in the quality of our feedback, that they’re just making sure that the student meets their criteria”.

During a discussion of the ways in which formative assessment practices could be improved, one participant explained that:

“one of the things that I think that is always going to be a big stumbling block is the level…the SQA place on formative assessment...”.

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This was echoed by another participant, who suggested that nothing could be improved “unless like it kind of goes up in [terms of priority for the] SQA and they can really then identify the value of formative assessments”. Here, the SQA is portrayed as the barrier for possible improvements, due to the lack of value they place on formative assessment as a concept.

Participants also discussed the priorities of the learners within their courses, and the difficulties in engaging learners in any aspect of learning beyond the learning outcomes. One participant explained how learners:

“know that to pass their college course, they must tick all these boxes. So they’re probably not thinking about anything else in terms of their learning. They’re only thinking about: this is what I need to do. That’s the outcome, I need to pass that assessment”.

Participants explained the difficulties that they had dealing with learner expectations and requirements, and how this restricted their teaching practice:

“what I think is a quite a common problem, that you give students formative assessments and they’re aware that they’re not part of their grade, then they don’t always submit them, or they don’t always put a lot of effort into them”.

“I was just talking to some other further education lecturers about this just before the summer, and they were saying that they often just don’t get the formative tasks back because they just they know that it’s just a task, it’s not graded”.

These comments underline the participants’ feelings of isolation within their practice, in terms of the disconnect between their understanding of their lecturing role, and their learners’ expectations of their learning. There was an underlying perception that formative assessment was not something that they could fully embed within their practice, due to it not being valued by other stakeholders, and that this led to a feeling of being isolated from their learners.

Participants also discussed the strategies they used to engage learners, including methods of persuasion:

“I sell them to the students as a way of saying to the students that when you’re going in to your working environment, you're going to have tasks”.

Other participants avoided discussion with learners of the formative nature of the assessment tasks:

“So I don’t tell them that it's only a formative, I just say, I need you to do this”.

“I don’t tell them that it's, that it's not part of their assessment”.

5.1.1.2.2 Focused code two: ‘lack of trust in awarding body’

The participants’ perceptions of feeling isolated in their practice were compounded by their lack of trust in the SQA on a number of levels. Participants expressed a lack of trust in the processes required by the SQA, such as the process for getting summative assessment instruments verified for use. There was a general belief that the decisions made within this process were “down to perception and opinion”, and that individual employees of the awarding body held too much power. As one participant expressed:

“it’s people who work full time for the SQA that tend to be making these decisions, and it almost seems to fall on just one EV [external verifier] for that course. But why is there just
one person with their unique personal opinion on this?”

“because what happens at the moment is the SQA make decisions, a) without consultation of those who are delivering it; B) without consultation for those that are in receipt of it and so it’s a very top down approach”.

Participants also expressed a lack of trust in the accuracy or reliability of the documentation provided by the awarding body. One participant explained:

“we looked at one that had been accepted as a prior verified assessment. We looked at it and it didn't cover the performance criteria for the unit. And, well, that passed, and my one which did cover the performance criteria didn't pass their verification process.”

But, as expressed by many participants, engaging with the prior verification process was almost a requirement for lecturers, to take pressure off them should their work be externally verified by the awarding body. Despite not trusting the process or the documents produced by the awarding body, participants had no option but to engage – further compounding their feelings of isolation from this visible stakeholder in the FE learning context.

Participants also discussed how the lack of trust affected their teaching practice, particularly in terms of the formative assessments they felt confident to do with learners. Given the need to work only with assessments that the SQA had verified or produced themselves, participants revealed an underlying lack of confidence in using their own assessment materials, or writing their own teaching materials that did not exactly mirror the requirements of the prior verified assessments. One participant explained how: “your formative assessment has to be kind of gearing towards the summative assessment”; another participant suggested that “you shouldn’t be teaching to an assessment but you kind of have to teach to an assessment”. Another participant explained how, during the Covid-19 pandemic, they had felt pressure to retain as much evidence of student attainment as possible – so that they had something “to present to the SQA, because they kept changing the rules”.

Participants’ perceptions of the extent to which they could trust the awarding body also related to the review that was ongoing at the time of data collection (see chapter 2.1.2). One participant articulated their thoughts as follows:

“So even if you went back about this document, this consultation document, who's taken ownership of that anyway, because is it the people that have gone in the past? Or is it the new people that are coming in? And are there really new people that are coming in? So actually, until they really get to grips with where they are, what direction we’re moving in? And even the consultations that are coming up from government are saying okay, keep on doing what we’re doing, until we replace it, but we don't know what we’re replacing it with. And we don’t know how long it's going to be until we replace it. And we don't know what it’s even going to really look like because none of us have got a vision for that yet. How, how do you move forward with that? You can't because there's nothing for you to grasp onto. There's nobody taking ownership. There's nobody taking leadership. So there's nothing”

Another participant articulated their lack of trust in the consultation process more succinctly:

“Do we have any trust that it's [the consultation] going to go anywhere?”

This absence of trust emphasised the participants feelings of isolation within their practice.
5.1.2.3 Focused code three: ‘working without clarity’.
The code ‘working without clarity’ provides us with further understanding of the participants’ feelings of isolation: the lack of clarity they have about aspects of their professional practice, causing them to feel isolated from other stakeholders in the FE learning context.

For some participants, this feeling of ‘working without clarity’ was linked to the absence of trust in the awarding body, as explained in 5.1.1.2.2, above. Describing the process of sending assessments to the awarding body to be verified, one participant explained how “you think that you’ve covered all the outcomes and performance criteria, and then seven weeks later or six weeks later you find out that they don’t think that you have”. The lack of clarity from the awarding body here caused a loss of confidence in participants. For some participants, however, this was not related to issues of trust, but simply due to the unclear language in which the course requirement documentation is written. As one participant suggested:

“the SQA documents have got learning outcomes things written in SQA language, but no one in the world speaks SQA language”.

For some participants, this was a lack of clarity in their (the participants’) own understanding of formative assessment, which also contributed to feelings of isolation. For some participants, there was an underlying lack of confidence in their own professional understanding or practices – “maybe we’re doing formative assessment wrong”; “will they want more than my scribbly little diary page?” - which led to hesitation when asking learners to engage in assessment activities. Other participants discussed the extra work in which they engaged due to lack of clarity – “I have no idea and then I feel like I’m falling back into that trap of, oh, I can’t miss anything, I must make sure I have that written down”.

There was an underlying feeling of apprehension within these discussions: not being sure of the requirements of their role, or the expectations of the awarding body, was a source of apprehension for participants. These discussions were characterised by questions:

“...and I think that’s what I mean. How much is enough? You know, for quality assurance, how much is enough?”

“But how much documentation of that is enough, do you know what I mean?”

“It’s that note taking bit that I’m talking about, you know, do we have to be formal in that note taking base? Do we have to keep our own notes in whatever way shape or form, you know?”

Some participants wanted the awarding body to provide clearer guidance regarding their expectations, and saw this as the solution to the lack of clarity. For example, one participant explained that “I’d like to see something like a guidance of what’s sufficient, what’s enough, you know”. Another called for “greater clarity where it’s needed”. But, as will be discussed in section 5.1.1.4.4, this call for clearer guidance was not made by all participants.

5.1.2.4 Focused code four: ‘Inconsistent support’.
Within this focused code, participants focused on the support from the institution and, to a lesser extent, the awarding body. With reference to the awarding body, discussions relating to this focused code centred on the participants’ beliefs that awarding body support or advice was inconsistent, depending on which individual was assigned to provide the support.
“I think that everything within the SQA is often as well down to personal perception and they are not working to a list of standards”.

“And if somebody else has been looking at yours, the outcome could have been different even when the EVs come. The EVs don’t sing off the same hymn sheet”.

Regarding the support provided by individuals within their institution, some participants held a similar perception: they believed that support provided by the institution was inconsistent depending upon which individuals they dealt with. There was a tension when participants discussed support provided by individuals within the institution; the participants acknowledged that they had experienced examples of good support, but queried whether such support was widespread across the institution:

“I don’t know for everybody else because everybody might not be the same. Everybody may be different. But had it not been for [named person]. .. I totally get that sink or swim thing”.

Furthermore, specifically when discussing their assessment practices, participants discussed the internal verification processes and how their personal knowledge of the person who had been allocated to verify their units would impact on their practice. As one participant articulated:

“I just think, mainly because [named colleague], whenever she fills in one of my [internal verification] forms. She always says remember to do the feed forward”.

This participant explained how they adapted their assessment practices in order to meet the expectations of the individual who would verify their unit – and viewed this as a supportive mechanism. But the participants shared a perception that support such as this was dependent on the participants forming personal connections with these colleagues.

“I don’t know if [named colleague] does them for anyone else, but she’s really good at doing an idiot guide to videos for me, so like it’s like a step by step of how to do it and that’s how I’ve learned like lots of things”.

The participants believed that pockets of support were available within the institution, but that these were not widespread or accessible to everyone. The participants discussed how individual colleagues “don’t have time to do [support] them all”. Instead, the participants believed that accessing good support was dependent on knowing the individuals.

This focused code also encompasses the participants’ belief that lecturers were not always aware of the support available at the institution. Relating specifically to assessment practices, one participant explained how she used resources provided by the institution – but the other participants were unaware of these resources or had discovered them by chance.

“is everyone aware of, just in this small group, those essential students skills, resources?”
“No!”
“I found it by accident. Just by rummaging around”.
“Yeah, so did I”.

5.1.1.2.5 Focused code five: ‘limited trust in institution’
This focused code was constructed from two initial codes: ‘unwilling to engage about improving practice’ and ‘cautious about producing good practice guidelines’. Participants expressed their
reluctance to engage in discussions about good practice or improving practice, not because they had no interest in improving their practice, but because they had little trust in how such conversations would be used by the institution. Referring to “top-down processes” that would be “imposed”, one participant explained that, “if the college came along and said we must all do a one size fits all, that might not work”.

The participants agreed that discussions about best practice could lead to the imposition of such top-down processes: one participant articulated it as follows:

“I feel that as soon as we start – and this applies kind of generally - as soon as we start saying: right, best practice is this, then they’re... it almost becomes like a structured tick box.”

The findings within this focused code can be read with reference to the category perceptions of professionalism (see section 5.1.14), as the participants’ focus was on retaining flexibility in order to meet the needs of their individual learners. For example, one participant explained how:

“I don’t know how the college could say right, we’ve got to have this standard of formative assessment because that will automatically start to generate systems of formative assessment that don’t suit everybody and don’t suit every student either”.

This code should also be read with reference to the category feeling restricted (section 5.1.1.3)– participants discussed their fears of falling into “traps” regarding formative assessment systems.

5.1.1.2.6 Summary: Isolated practice

The category isolated practice gives insight into the ways in which participants feel isolated within their professional practice, and feel distanced from the other stakeholders in the FE learning context. Although they acknowledged examples of good support from their colleagues, participants also discussed their beliefs that support structures could not be relied upon or were not appropriately placed. The codes within this category also highlight the extent to which participants feel isolated in terms of their understanding of their role – where their perspectives of their role differ from the perspectives of other stakeholders, and where lecturers do not have sufficient clarity to understand or be confident in their role. As demonstrated within the last focused code, participants also have limited trust in the institution at which they work, and this further contributes to their sense of isolation.

5.1.1.3 Category three: ‘feeling restricted’

The category feeling restricted is made up of three focused codes: 1) ‘Restrictive requirements of awarding body’, 2) ‘Institutional restrictions on practice’, 3) ‘Invisible restrictions’. The initial codes which led to the creation of these focused codes are listed in green within figure 5.3.
5.1.1.3.1 Focused code one: ‘restrictive requirements of the awarding body’.

Of the three focused codes, ‘restrictive requirements of the awarding body’ was a clear focus for participants, with a significant number of initial codes leading to its creation.

Participants were critical of the phrasing within the documentation produced by the SQA to guide lecturers in the assessment of the learning programmes, which they considered to be unhelpfully prescriptive. The rigid wording of the evidence requirements and learning outcomes was a particular focus for the participants, as expressed in the following words:
“just now it’s all still dictated by the evidence requirements... so unless we can move away from that idea of these key determined evidence requirements being so static in their interpretation, then there’s no point in trying to do anything else to improve the system”.

There was an overwhelming belief that the wording of the evidence requirements did not allow lecturers to support their learners as individuals. Participants expressed this as follows:

“it’s never about the individual, it’s - it’s a conveyor belt”.

“There is a rigidity to the evidence requirements which means there is no room for personalisation of learning for our learners”.

Awarding body documentation which had not been updated also caused participants to feel restricted, as explained by one participant:

“In 2021 safeguarding in Scotland completely changed. It was totally turned on its head with the new frameworks, the way in which we look at - even the way we look from the 2014 guidance to the 2021 is very, very different. So when students are working, we are now trying to balance between ensuring that they understand 2021 frameworks for our writing assessment that are written in line with 2014 frameworks which are not the same, because the evidence requirements that have been asked have been written in line with that”.

5.1.1.3.2 Focused code two: ‘institutional restrictions on practice’.

As indicated by the initial codes within figure 5.3, participants identified a number of ways in which their assessment practices were restricted by the institution itself. These included a belief that the support provided by the institution focused only on the summative assessment requirements of the awarding body, and that “in terms of any kind of [other] planning and strategic educational management, there’s just a black hole...and that’s a huge problem”.

For example, participants explained how the institution’s paperwork focused solely on summative attainment, and that consideration of other aspects of learning was:

“not embedded in our teaching ethos...it’s like that unit, then that unit, then that unit, so there’s little...holistic nature to it”.

As highlighted within section 5.1.1.1.1, one participant explained how this focus on summative assessment “limits people’s [lecturers’] thinking in terms of feedback”, restricting them to commenting only in terms of summative attainment. Another participant explained how:

“it would be lovely to be able to comment on effort, attendance, etc., you know... [but] I’m currently not, I’m just making sure they pass the unit, because you know, they have to pass the unit to pass the course and that’s where my focus has to be”.

Participants discussed how they had devised their own strategies to comment beyond the summative attainment of a learner – for example, through emails to other members of the teaching team:

“It’ll be like ‘Hi [lecturer name] and [lecturer name]’ – and I’ll cc the student in – ‘I just thought I’d let you know that such and such has been doing an absolutely amazing job on this portfolio....’”.

However, participants expressed dissatisfaction that such strategies were not recognised as important by line managers – “it’s not like it’s embedded” – and that spending time on strategies
such as these was not considered a priority by the management team within the institution. Participants felt restricted in terms of the need to justify time spent on strategies such as these.

There was also a perceived disconnect between the expectations of the management team and other members of staff, and the lecturers themselves:

“\textquotesingleI\textquotesingleve spoken to teachers themselves who have said, well actually, I would love to be able to do this and do that. But you know, I wouldn\textquotesinglet feel comfortable doing it because you know, that\textquotesingles not how the other teachers do it or the principal, the head teacher, would be quite unhappy with it”.\textquotesingle

In this respect, participants demonstrated their perceptions of the ways in which their practice was restricted by their colleagues and/or managers.

Furthermore, some of the initial codes displayed within figure 5.3 demonstrate the participants\textquotesingle fears that their feelings of restriction could be increased with any new requirement adopted by the institution – and that any innovation or identification of good practice might be imposed upon them as a one-size-fits all system to be adopted by all lecturers. As explored within section 5.1.1.2.5, participants revealed their lack of trust in the institution – they were concerned that the institution might use ideas of ‘best practice’ to impose a specific system on lecturers.

One participant described how they would:

“shrink back from this idea of forming a system, you know, creating a structure within which there\textquotesingles a system of formative assessment. That just gives me the heebie jeebies”.

Comments such as these demonstrate the wider impact of the category ‘feeling restricted’. Participants demonstrated an unwillingness to engage in conversations about ways to improve their practice, for fear of unwittingly creating further restrictions for themselves or their colleagues.

5.1.1.3.3 Focused code three: ‘invisible restrictions’
Participants also identified restrictions to their practice which were less visible, or harder to quantify. These included a lack of time to engage in formative assessment practices, and particularly an absence of time to improve formative assessment systems or practices. When discussing why participants repeatedly use the same assessment materials, one participant explained simply “it is very, very time consuming to create new materials”.

During another discussion, participants were exploring ways of reducing the assessment burden for learners by devising assessments that would meet the requirements for more than one unit. Two ‘invisible’ restrictions were put forward: one participant queried whether it would be worth the effort, given that the awarding body likely wouldn’t accept assessments which assessed anything beyond that which was written into the specification, whilst another participant explained that “I\textquotesingled have to be honest and say I won\textquotesinglet have time”.

5.1.1.3.4 Summary: ‘feeling restricted’
This category suggests that participants felt their practice to be restricted by a number of different stakeholders in the assessment process. Participants were most interested in discussing the restrictions caused by the awarding body, with the majority of initial codes indicating this focus. However, their comments also demonstrated that their feelings of restriction stemmed from the expectations of other staff members, and the requirements of the institution at which they teach. It was not just the requirements of the institution as they stand, but the participants\textquotesingle fear that new
systems, structures or checklists might be imposed upon their practice by the institution should there be innovation or new ideas of ‘best practice’.

5.1.1.4 Category four: ‘perceptions of professionalism’

The category ‘perceptions of professionalism’ is made up of four focused codes: 1) ‘taking responsibility’, 2) ‘using a wide lens to view practice’, 3) ‘working as individuals’ and 4) ‘wanting to use professional judgement’. This category explores the aspects of their professional practice which the participants consider as necessary to allow them to “do justice to students” (Kelchtermans 2009, p. 262). The initial codes which led to the construction of these focused codes are listed in green within figure 5.4.

**Figure 5.4: the initial and focused codes from which category four was constructed.**

5.1.1.4.1 Focused code one: ‘taking responsibility’.

Within the initial codes that made up this focused code, the participants demonstrated a responsibility for improving their professional practice, and a clear capacity for reflection. These were apparent within the contributions of all participants, regardless of their levels of experience or their positions within the institution. Participants described reflection as a constant feature of their practice, which was part of taking responsibility for their teaching:

“you’re constantly kind of revisiting it [one’s practice] and talking to your colleagues, talking to yourself, and having that conversation about how we can tweak it and make it better”.

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“you're constantly kind of thinking about it...so you've been working it out, you’re constantly reflecting, and it's a very steep learning curve”.

One participant described the drive for improvement in the following terms:

“even if they're pretty good and students are engaged, you come away from them with this kind of feeling that you’re sinking, feeling is this going well, on the whole is it going well? Am I doing it correctly?”

This quotation suggests a level of anxiety about one’s professional practice, and links to the focused code ‘working without clarity’ discussed within section 5.1.1.2.3.

Participants explained how their reflections led to changes in their teaching practice. These quotations indicate the ways in which participants had taken responsibility for the learning of their learners:

“And I thought, I'm gonna have to change how I deliver this, because otherwise they’re not going to get through the course”.

“...so we redid all the assessments”.

For some participants, there was no distinction between their professional practice and their professional identities: one participant described how “we’re constantly reinventing ourselves”; another participant explained that “I am learning all the time”.

During the action research meetings held in the first three months of the project, this constant reflection and focus on improvement had a clear goal for most participants – it was focused specifically on taking responsibility for their practice in order to benefit their learners.

“I'm trying because I want to do a good job. I want to do well by the students, you know”

However, during the fourth monthly meeting, participants started to discuss improvements in terms of how they could support other lecturers within the institution.

“So it’s just getting them [lecturers] to understand that, and to understand that there are other ways of doing it, which may or may not make things better, you know”

“But I think before we could do that we would need to make sure people knew what it was”.

“We need to go back to the whole induction programme”.

As well as demonstrating the increasing responsibility that they felt for the practice of other lecturers within the institution, participants also demonstrated the value that they placed on the action research group, as indicated within this quotation.

“I think the key is - the key is a) to make sure that people are doing it, and b) to make sure they’re doing it the way that we as a group have found to be most effective throughout our careers”.

That participants felt that the group they were in – which had a range of experiences and qualification levels – was an example of good practice contributing to their PL and development is
demonstrated within these quotations. The levels on which the participants were taking responsibility for learning and teaching had extended by this point during the action research project.

5.1.1.4.2 Focused code two: ‘using a wide lens to view practice’.

It was apparent from the very first of the action research meetings that participants did not want to restrict the conversations specifically to the topic of assessment. The initial code ‘considering assessment as one part of the jigsaw’ encapsulates this idea. When discussing strategies to engage learners in formative assessment, one participant explained:

“I think you have to set out your stall right at the start. Yeah, and that all starts with the marketing of the course, you know, so they know where they’re coming into and is it just too difficult to do at that stage”.

“one of the things I think we do miss a trick on a little bit … is this idea of giving students, on all courses, a much clearer idea of what they’re letting themselves in for”.

There was repeated discussion of the importance of student motivation:

“I think it ties into what we talked about earlier, which is the 'subject' and the kind of people that are there, and what their drive is to get there.”

“One thing is, are people going on a course that they've actually got the skills to do in the first place, because obviously if we’re getting students to come on and they haven't got some of the basic skills - which we still do, unfortunately….. and two is, do they want to be there?”

Within the earlier action research meetings, attempts had to be made by the researcher to lead the participants back to the focus on formative assessment. Participants acknowledged this, but were clear that this specific initial focus of mine, in my researcher role, was not appropriate, and that assessment could not be considered in isolation:

“we should be telling them what they’re going to get: what's optional, how it's being taught and that; I know that's not what you’re talking about, Susie, in terms of assessment, [but] I think it's such an important thing”.

This wider focus that the participants wanted to use applied to the way in which participants considered their learners’ lives, too – as demonstrated within the initial code ‘lecturers considering students’ wider lives’. For example, when discussing learners who were returning to education, one participant explained:

“going from, you know, maybe, oh well I can vaguely remember something when I was in school about that but actually you know life's gone on since then, and I have no idea really, to come in and to be doing something at higher level is a big ask”.

“we’re asking them to do all these things that most of them haven't been doing: they haven’t been thinking about theories, they haven't been thinking about how to reference work, you know, just the academic writing side, they’re not used to doing”.

Or, as another participant described it:
“...all of a sudden we pop up with all of these things that they have to do”

The focused code ‘using a wide lens to view practice’ also encompasses the participants’ belief that assessment practices should not be limited to the learning outcomes specified by the awarding body. Participants appreciated the opportunity to provide feedback that was wider in scope than just referring to the learning outcomes. For some participants, this was what formative assessment allowed for, in a way that summative assessment did not:

“I’ve had students before who, you know, the writing levels are so poor that that, you know, they would struggle to pass. I think... formative assessments is not just about the outcomes. It's also about establishing where they are”.

“It's not just for seeing if they're meeting those outcomes, but also just their kind of reading and writing levels, especially for NC [National Certificate]”.

One participant discussed a feedback form that had been designed for one specific curriculum area, which:

“gives opportunity to include things like how did you engage in class? How do you join in discussions? There's scope within it for me to be able to recognise those students that go that extra mile or do that bit more, put more effort in, and I think that's a really good system”.

Participants indicated that they appreciated formative assessment because it allowed a wider consideration of the subject they taught, too. For example:

“But that formative assessment can make the lesson so much more interesting, you know, can take off and you can learn all sorts of different things without coming away from the summative assessment”.

5.1.1.4.3 Focused code three: ‘working as individuals’

This focused code explores the extent to which participants emphasised the individual nature of their practice, and the importance of being able to use their professional judgement to vary their practice, as required. One participant explained that:

“it's about my teaching style; [named participant]’s got a different group, a different subject, a different way of teaching, and my way of doing assessment might not fit in with what he does, and vice versa”.

Another participant explained that they needed to vary their practice because “every group is different. Every class is different”.

Participants speculated that this was true of other lecturers within the institution and across the sector generally:

“...one of the things I’m guessing is that the way that people in FE do formative assessment is very varied”.

The primary reason that participants gave for varying their practice was to respond to their learners’
needs. They spoke specifically about the efforts they made to create formative assessment paperwork which aligned with the wider view they took of assessment opportunities, which links back to the ideas explored within section 5.1.4.2:

“I actually just create my own word document form for myself to use”.

“I try to document any conversations that we have”.

“I can see every time that each individual submits what they write what they put up onto the jam board and I can screen save it. So I’ve got a copy for evidence, you know”

Participants demonstrated a determination to ensure that the learning experience was positive for their learners, and showed creativity in their approaches to ensuring this positive learning experience.

“we looked at the [named course] and said no, because people who want to learn, who want to learn how to do [one aspect of the subject] are not the same people who want to understand the history of [one aspect of the subject... So we took - we split them basically and we came up with a new kind of structure”.

For these participants, being able to take a creative approach to their practice was crucial – and a positive aspect of their practice:

“I love that, I love that we can constantly challenge and say well yeah that’s fine but, but could we not, you know, try x y z, and if it doesn’t work, x, y and so on and so forth.”

“I started doing that. It’s almost like my new toy- I’m really enjoying it. It’s made me think I can actually do this but in a slightly less structured way”.

The findings here link to those explored within section 5.1.3 (focused code ‘institutional restrictions’) and to those that will be explored within section 5.1.5 (the category support structures): a recurring theme throughout the participants’ discussions was the importance of being able to be flexible, and the need to give lecturers the agency to make professional judgements regarding the way they teach.

5.1.1.4.4 Focused code four: ‘wanting to use professional judgement’

The ideas explored within the focused code ‘wanting to use professional judgement’ link back to those expressed within the category feeling restricted (section 5.1.3). The underlying feeling expressed within this focused code was one of fear that participants did not have autonomy within their practice, or fear that the autonomy that they felt currently might be taken away. However, there was a conflict within the participant group as to whether they would benefit from clearer guidance or structures. Within the category isolated practice, the focused code ‘working without clarity’ included an exploration of some participants’ need for clearer guidance or clearer guidelines (see section 5.1.1.2). However, other participants rejected this idea, and were keen to defend their ability to use their professional judgement in terms of how they implemented the requirements of their practice. For example, participants expressed concerns about producing guidelines about good practice in formative assessment:

“I think there needs to be a bit of caution because we could, we could end up with formative assessment can become this giant monster that we’re all trying to keep up with”.

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“I can almost hear the teaching teams, saying god, something you know, something else has come along. And we've obviously going to avoid that”.

“I think it would be really easy exactly - what you were saying - falling into a trap of saying ‘this is the structure’”.

“I get exactly what you’re saying [named participant], because I don't want to have to conform to any structure in my formative assessment”.

For the participants who were keen to avoid prescribed standards or systems of formative assessment, they felt it was vital that they could maintain their flexible approach to their practice; their ability to mould their practice to suit the needs of their individual learners or specific groups was important to them in this respect.

“It depends on loads of stuff, and I don't know how you could - I don't know how the college could say right, we've got to have this standard of formative assessment because that will automatically start to generate systems of formative assessment that don't suit everybody and don't suit every student either”.

“It gets to the point where there's very little autonomy for teachers and lecturers. That’s the problem”.

“We want guidance about it, but we don't want to be prescribed. You know, we don't want actions prescribed that we must do in order to be a good teacher”.

For these participants, the beliefs held by their colleagues regarding the need for more guidance were indicative of their colleagues’ fear of ‘getting into trouble’:

“at some point, we lost that ability to say well actually I'm going to assess the students this way, because this is going to work really well from my group of students and with the technology and resources that I have. And that's worked really well for my course and my unit and you know, that sort of thing. But instead what we do is we want everything very much written down in detail so that we don't get into trouble”.

The ideas explored within this focused code demonstrate that some participants believed that lecturers should be able to use their professional judgement and agency. They expressed their belief that the awarding body was responsible for the restrictions placed on them:

“we don't [use professional judgement] from fear of the SQA”.

5.1.4.5 Summary: ‘perceptions of professionalism’
The category ‘perceptions of professionalism’ reflects aspects of the participants’ professional practice which they considered necessary to allow them to “do justice to students” (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 262). The ideas explored within this category show the extent to which participants take responsibility for their students’ learning, which extends beyond the boundaries of the awarding body requirements and assessment opportunities, and requires participants to reflect upon and adapt their practice according to the needs of their learners. This category echoes ideas explored within the category feeling restricted, in terms of the fears that participants have of further restrictions being placed upon their practice and of the potential for new requirements (from the awarding body or the institution) to result in a loss of autonomy. The participants’ shared an underlying feeling of optimism regarding lecturers and their capabilities, as summarised by one
participant:
   “But really, we are very capable as lecturers - teachers - who are qualified and experienced at probably creating an opportunity for assessments and actually doing assessing”.

5.1.1.5 Category five: ‘support structures’
The category ‘support structures’ is made up of five focused codes: 1) ‘observing practice’, 2) benefitting from dialogue’, 3) ‘impact of others’, 4) ‘acknowledging action research as support’ and 5) ‘benefitting from teacher education courses’. The initial codes from which these focused codes were constructed are listed in green within figure 5.5.

![Figure 5.5: the initial and focused codes from which category five was constructed.]

5.1.1.5.1 Focused code one: ‘observing practice’
This focused code explores the participants’ views regarding observation as a support mechanism. All references made to observations were positive. For example, one participant described themselves as being “really lucky” because their line manager “watched me [teach] for a couple of hours” and “gave me a lot of hints and tips, you know, watch for this; watch for that; do this; do this”.

When asked what types of support the participants would appreciate, participants were enthusiastic not just about being observed, but of the supportive impact of observing other lecturers:
   “I think that opportunity to go in and watch somebody – in action sort of thing? Well. That would be great”.

They articulated how observing their colleagues was useful both in terms of gaining ideas and in terms of validating their own approaches to practice:
“that was very helpful. It made me think like no, no, this is how people are doing it. I do something very similar. It’s very reassuring to be like you know, you’re not just there doing something completely [different].”

When discussing the impact of observing others, participants again emphasised the idea of variety within practice:

“I was just gonna say observe, I mean even better to be sitting in a variety of different classes and see other people do it would have helped.”

This emphasis on variety reiterates the participants’ focus on not conforming to one set structure or template within their practice, as seen within the categories feeling restricted and perceptions of professionalism.

5.1.5.2 Focused code two: ‘benefitting from dialogue’

The ideas explored within focused code ‘benefitting from dialogue’ show the positive impact that the participants believed dialogue with peers could have on their practice. Echoing ideas expressed within the category perceptions of professionalism (section 5.1.4.1) regarding the ways in which they tried to improve their practice, the participants also expressed the ways in which dialogue with colleagues improves their practice:

“talking to your colleagues... and having that conversation about how we can tweak it and make it better”.

“you speak to different people and we’re supposed to collaborate with our peers, you know, with other people and organisations on this, [and] every time there's opportunities to learn something else or some way a different way of looking at something”.

The importance of sharing practice between peers was articulated within the discussions:

“[There are] people who need, who – who need advice, and who need to have forums where they can discuss it and get help not to be to be told to do this, but where they can actually share ideas with people who do have some experience and options”

One participant summarised the positive impact of sharing through dialogue as follows:

“I think the more we share, the more we share those experiences, the better. We should get the conversation around”.

Participants expressed an enthusiasm for dialogue with colleagues in different curriculum areas:

“...not just working with our own topic. Let’s meet up in other ways with different people that are doing different subjects.”

“I think that’s a question for me: is it within disciplines, or is it cross party? I think it should be cross party, to be quite honest”.

One participant specifically valued opportunities for dialogue with their line manager:

“I am incredibly fortunate, one of the things that I like about [named line manager], you know, you can always have a discussion”.

Indeed, the fact that the institution does not, according to participants, deliberately facilitate opportunities for dialogue between colleagues was seen by one participant as a failing:
“There doesn’t seem to be that [deliberate facilitating of dialogue] and I wonder - I think that’s a weakness of the college”.

5.1.1.5.3 Focused code three: Impact of others
Related to the focused code above, participants also discussed the supportive impact of other individuals within the institution, as articulated within focused code ‘impact of others’.

The initial code ‘positive impact of individuals’ was derived from comments made by participants about the people from whom they received support. Participants accessed support from a number of different sources. Some comments referred to the support provided by line managers: for example, one participant explained how a supportive line manager had “answered hundreds – no, she has answered thousands of questions from me in two years”. For this participant, the support provided by their line manager was crucial:

“If it hadn’t been for [named line manager], I would basically have one day turned up and attempted to teach, you know, people who I’d never have seen in my life and I’d have had to wing it”.

Other participants explained how they relied on their peers within their curriculum areas for guidance, rather than relying on the guidance produced by the institution or the people whose job it was to provide the support:

“It was like a nightmare for me because it was like learning tech skills that I had no idea about and [named colleague] was really good at putting stuff up in video rather than step by step writing it because it just doesn’t mean anything to me. The language - tech language; computer language - means absolutely nothing to me so if [named colleague] shows me how to do it in a video then I know how to do it”.

However, it is relevant here to refer to the focused code ‘inconsistent support’ (section 5.1.1.2.4) within the category isolated practice. Within section 5.1.1.2.4, a summary of the participants concerns related to support from their colleagues and/or line managers is provided, which emphasises the participants’ belief that the support available was dependent on one’s personal relationships within the college, or dependent on one individual within the college. Participants acknowledged that they had received good support, but that such support was not necessarily available to everybody. They believed that pockets of support were available, but not widespread or accessible to everyone. The fact that there is repetition between the categories ‘support structures’ and ‘isolated practice’ is worth highlighting.

5.1.1.5.4 Focused code four: Action research as support
This focused code explores the ways in which the participants considered the action research meetings to be a means of support. Some participants considered the meetings to be the first time they had been able to discuss aspects of their practice with other lecturers:

“It’s really interesting, because you know these, you know these are kind of conversations I’ve never had”.

For others, the meetings were a unique opportunity to engage in dialogue with colleagues from different subject areas:

“…it’s been very interesting - I’d normally I wouldn’t talk with [named participant] because we work in such different discipline areas. But that’s been really interesting talking with you, [named participant].”
The initial codes from which this focused code was constructed demonstrate the positive impact of this dialogue in terms of enabling participants to reflect on and question their own practice:

“...you saying that has made me say to myself, well am I, am I maybe doing too much, as you know I’m asking myself that question”.

“I’m now questioning ... I’m asking myself, I need to go and find out a little bit about this. But that’s good. That’s not a bad thing, you know?”

Participants drew upon the experiences of others:

“...now when I’m listening to you, [named participant], I see that that is the purpose, of course it is...”

“...that’s what I was going to ask [named participant]”.

Participants identified areas which would benefit from further collaboration:

“...maybe that’s something that we could do with work on together?”

Participants were enthusiastic about both the experience of engaging in the action research meetings – “you just get a good conversation. You can’t legislate for that” – and the impact of the dialogue on their professional practice:

“I love this because it’s so interesting. We should have these all the time and we chitchat about things. I love it because it encourages you to think yourself about it differently. I think it’s - it’s that sort of undocumented CPD”.

5.1.1.5.5 Focused code five: ‘benefitting from teacher education courses’

Participants were unanimous in their belief in the value of teacher education courses for new practitioners. The positive impacts of courses such as the PDA Teaching Practice in Scotland’s Colleges, an SCQF level 9 course targeted at relatively new teaching practitioners, were repeatedly referred to within the action research meetings, as participants discussed how their assessment practices have evolved.

“it was really the PDA that introduced me to formative assessment”.

For new practitioners, courses such as the PDA provided insights into pedagogy and/or practices of which they were otherwise unaware.

“I do think that (assessment methods) needs to be taught.

I think [named participant] is right, Susie, it - I think - I do think that needs to be taught. Because people need to understand that this is a useful - very useful in my own experience”.

Participants were also clear that they would have appreciated a formal ‘teaching’ course at the beginning of their teaching careers:

“maybe something of a very, very short mandatory, like, online course. You know, no teaching, really just terminology, kind of things. So people do know just the kind of
This focused code also explores the idea that teacher education courses are not just of benefit in terms of the content that is delivered, but also in terms of the opportunities for lecturers to interact with their peers. Echoing ideas expressed earlier within this section (section 5.1.5.2), participants explained:

“But, see, coming to do the [named course] and mixing with people who are doing totally different topics, just opens your mind to a whole new world that's out there”

“I've learnt so much for listening to people on the [named course]”

“they all have things we've never even thought of”.

5.1.5.6 Summary: ‘support structures’
The category ‘support structures’ reflects the participants’ perceptions of the support mechanisms available to them. The participants referred to formal support mechanisms, including teacher education courses and organised observations, as well as informal support mechanisms such as dialogue between lecturers. One source of tension within this category relates to the participants’ perceptions that some support was dependent on the personal connections or relationships that lecturers can establish within the college, and that this support was not facilitated by the college structures or processes. This category also encompasses the participants’ belief that the action research meetings with which they were engaging in the present study provided them with support.
5.1.1.6 Category six: ‘Seeking change’

The category seeking change is constructed from four focused codes: 1) ‘desire for change in FE landscape’, 2) ‘feeling supported to enact change’, 3) ‘lecturers working collaboratively’, 4) ‘not believing change is possible’. The initial codes from which these focused codes were constructed are listed within figure 5.6.

5.1.1.6.1 Focused code one: ‘desire for change in FE landscape’. 

The first initial code from which this focused code was constructed was ‘desire for change within awarding body’. This code was present from the first of the action research meetings, and led to the group’s contribution to the awarding body consultation as part of the research process (see section 3.5.2). The participants shared a belief that change within the awarding body was necessary.

“I would like to see big changes in the SQA”.

“...my idea of going to the SQA is not as in the SQA as it is now. No, because that [the SQA] doesn’t work [as it is now]”.

Participants were able to articulate the changes that they would like to see:

“...if we had some kind of summative assessment that was holistic, that would make the burden of assessment so much better from the students’ point of view”.

“I’m hoping SQA will say, why have we, why did they have to do two of those [assessments], you know when one of those [assessments] shows that they are capable of attaining it”.

Figure 5.6 The initial and focused codes from which category six was constructed.
Participants believed that changes made by or within the awarding body would have an impact on their professional practice:

“Do you not think if it came from this SQA – so if our units were created with the idea that we’re embedding the Curriculum for Excellence at senior phase, that we were creating teaching, assessment and feedback opportunities with that holistic approach, child-centred, person-centred approach with the [CfE] capacities - then it would be more likely to be embedded?”

Some participants linked the restrictions that they believed were caused by the awarding body to the barriers that they observed within the institution:

“because the SQA wouldn’t publish any guidance to say how to do it, and therefore [named institution] wouldn’t do it”.

The awarding body consultation was referred to multiple times within the action research meetings. Participants articulated their hope that the consultation would result in change:

“I’m holding on to every hope beyond belief that when we’ve got this new system that’s coming into place then it will be different”.

The focused code ‘desire for change within FE landscape’ also incorporates the initial code ‘working outside the system to fulfil professional values’. Within this initial code, participants discussed the extent to which some practices that were required of them within the FE landscape conflicted with their professional values – and how they overcame these conflicts. One participant discussed their decision to assess learners using software that had not been authorised within the institution for assessment use:

“So I took decision that I was going to assess them online via [named software]. And that if at any point, any EV person comes along and challenges that, well, I have a bag full of stuff to talk to them about”.

Another participant discussed aspects of their professional practice that were not required by the institution, but in which they engaged:

“It's not like it's embedded - that's just me at the end of a class showing that she's doing really well...how else can I let the student know that she's doing really well and celebrate those things?”

Specifically with reference to assessment mechanisms, one participant described a change that they had made to their practice in the following terms:

“...it’s about celebrating, not just that yes/no box you know, you think about what they’ve done a bit more holistic. And I would say that yeah, we’re doing that in practice, because that’s just the way that we are that so that’s our delivery ethos, it’s our pedagogy, in part, it’s really a thing, but it’s not documented. It’s not like I wrote it down anywhere that I do that”.

The ideas articulated within this initial code demonstrate the ways in which participants extended their professional practice to fulfil their professional values, therefore demonstrating the extent to which they perceived change to be necessary.
5.1.1.6.2 Focused code two: ‘feeling supported to enact change’.
This focused code was made up of two initial codes: ‘institutional culture supporting challenge’ and ‘feeling supported by line manager’. When discussing how practitioners can effect change, one participant noted that “the culture needs to be right to allow that to happen”, adding their belief that:

“the culture in [research institution] still remains a very progressive one, very willing to look at change, very open”.

Another participant stated that:

“one thing I love about this college... is we are not afraid to try different things”.

One participant specifically wished to discuss the support they had received from their line manager:

“[named line manager] is very much, you know, if something isn’t right, you know, let’s change it”.

These codes were constructed from only one of the meetings; theoretical sampling means that the researcher looked specifically for whether these ideas were relevant to the other action research group, but found that they were not. Nevertheless, it is important to note their presence within one action research group meeting.

5.1.1.6.3 Focused code three: ‘lecturers working collaboratively’.
Within action research meetings 1a and 1b, some participants were able to describe examples of where they had collaborated with other lecturers to change aspects of their practice.

“I think we made it, yeh – I think we made it, [named person]”.

“It’s just one of the things that we did when we redid the course”.

Participants articulated the benefits of collaboration – and the limits of working on their own:

“...we are going to collaborate on it...That’s good, because we’ll make it better”.

“...[without collaboration] you won’t be able to compare with other people”.

From action research meeting 2a onwards, participants identified areas that they would like to collaborate on:

“maybe that’s something that we could work on together within the team, and have a look...?”

“perhaps we could move that along right through?”

5.1.1.6.4 Focused code four: ‘not believing change is possible’.
Despite the hopes articulated in section 5.1.1.6.1, there was an underlying perception that the changes that participants believed necessary at the macro level would not be made.

“My feeling is that probably it’s just going to be the same people – I do – the same organisation under a different title, which then means nothing. We’ve got there a really exciting opportunity that, essentially, it could change, and it could be more reflective of the needs of education just now. And if that’s the case, fabulous. If it’s not, then what’s the point of doing it all. It’s just a waste of money”.

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Participants believed that they could change aspects of their individual practice, but that any changes that they made, whilst valuable, would be:

“a sticking plaster, because the assessment process needs fundamental reform”.

5.1.1.6.5 Summary: Seeking change.
The category seeking change reflects the participants’ shared perceptions that change within the FE system is necessary. A particular focus for the participants was the awarding body. The codes included within this category reflect the participants’ belief that their professional practice is affected by the requirements of the awarding body, and demonstrate the participants’ views about the specific change that is required.

Although this category mirrors some of the ideas within the category feeling restricted, this category shows how participants overcome their feelings of restriction by seeking change. It shows how some participants felt supported to make changes within their professional practice. Other participants discussed their decisions to implement change without such support.

This category also reflects the positive value that the participants placed on collaborative working.

5.1.2 Metaphor analysis
Cameron et al. (2009, p. 64) assert that metaphor analysis can be used as a tool to uncover people’s ideas, attitudes and values. The process of analysis described in chapter three (methodology) results in coded data which Cameron et al. (2009, p. 76) suggest can be used to provide both quantitative description and qualitative exploration of the metaphors. A further outcome of the metaphor analysis articulated by Cameron and Maslen (2010) is an interpretive metaphor synthesis, which aims to connect the range of metaphors that have been used within the discourse in order to “provide a general answer ... to complement other answers already provided” (Cameron and Maslen, 2010, p. 22) through other means of analysis. All three outcomes are presented within this section.

5.1.2.1 Quantitative description of the metaphor vehicles
Cameron et al. (2010) encourage researchers to present quantitative description of the metaphor use, to support their subsequent qualitative description and interpretive synthesis. They suggest that researchers consider the range of metaphors used to talk about the key discourse topics. Table 5.1 (below) shows a breakdown of the number of metaphors used by the participants in meetings 1a and 1b, relating to each of the key discourse topics.

Table 5.1: The number of metaphors relating to the key discourse topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>1a</th>
<th>1b</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – assessment and feedback practices</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – teaching and learning (includes learning and teaching activities)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – awarding body (includes awarding body documentation)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Curriculum for Excellence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – institution (includes institutional processes)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – learners</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – lecturers</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 – qualification structures / learning programmes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 – learners and lecturers (specifically together)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – people opting out of the system</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Both groups used metaphor to discuss topic 1 (assessment and feedback practices) in fairly equal numbers.

The findings from the Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) coding process show that the participants shared feelings of restriction within their professional practice. Despite this shared feeling, the quantitative description of metaphor vehicles shows that there were differences in focus between the two groups: for example, topic three (the awarding body) was of significant interest to group 1a, but of marginal interest to group 1b. Conversely, topic five (the institution) was of significant interest to group 1b and of marginal interest to group 1a.

Within transcript 1a, participants described the awarding body as a “dictatorship” and suggested that the awarding body was “dictating” the actions of the lecturers. They discussed the “prescriptive” nature of the curriculum, which is “still dictated by the evidence requirements”. They discussed the ways in which the awarding body is “imposing” on the participants, and how their professional practice is “governed” by the awarding body. Another vehicle of interest relating to topic 3 within transcript 1a is “pressure”; participants explored how the “pressure is always on” to justify their decisions to the awarding body, and explain how removing some of the summative assessment burden would “take away the pressure” on students. One participant introduced the vehicle group ‘engulf’ when discussing this pressure, describing how they “get overwhelmed” by assessment pressure.

Similarly, probing into the microlevel of transcript 1b, the focus on the institution (topic 5) includes the vehicle grouping ‘control’, which participants used to discuss their fears about the institution “imposing a top down process” onto lecturers’ professional practices. Within the landscape of this discourse, participants also introduced the vehicle grouping ‘threat’, using the metaphors ‘danger’ – “there’s always a danger that change can be put on top of everything else” – and ‘protect’ – “protecting their backs”.

5.1.2.2 Qualitative exploration of the metaphors

The metaphor vehicle ‘journey’ was used within both meetings 1a and 1b, predominantly in relation to the key discourse topic ‘learners’ (9 of 14 uses). Participants used the metaphor “learning journey”, which is fairly common within educational discourse, but also described learners as “cruising” and “progressing on to”, to describe a learner’s increase in abilities.

Related to the ‘journey’ metaphor, the metaphor vehicle ‘movement’ was also of clear relevance to participants. Participants from both groups 1a and 1b used the vehicle ‘movement’ to discuss all key discourse topics except topic four (the Curriculum for Excellence) and nine (lecturers and learners together). It was particularly used in relation to topic one (assessment and feedback) and topic six (learners). For example, in relation to topic one, participants discussed how learners and lecturers were “trying to keep up with” awarding body assessment requirements; in relation to topic six, participants described how they tried “to bring learners up” and to “bring them forward”.

Exploring this vehicle further, it is notable that the only vehicle used to discuss topic eight (qualification structures and learning programmes) is ‘movement – up and down’. Participants within both groups used this vehicle: they described the ‘drop’ in learner progress; they described the ‘leap up’ between qualifications and how they give students a ‘booster’. When discussing the qualification structure – which is set by macro level policies – the participants used metaphors to do
with hierarchical movement which do not align with the metaphors to do with their own values and ideas about education, whereby the destinations are varied and there is a landscape of possibilities. This conflict between what the values held by the participants and those that they ascribed to the macro context of qualification structures can be linked to their feelings of isolation within their professional practice.

The metaphor vehicle ‘restriction’ was used by both groups, primarily relating to topic seven (lecturers). Participants used metaphors such as “confined” and “restricted” to describe the impact of the awarding body requirements; they described themselves as “trapped” and used the word “capture”.

A related vehicle grouping of interest is the metaphor of ‘control’, which was used fifteen times across the meetings, most commonly ascribed to topic three (awarding body). Participants used metaphors including ‘prescribe’, ‘dictate’, ‘govern’, ‘dictatorship’.

It is interesting to consider the extent to which opposite metaphors are used. The metaphor ‘asserting control’ (as opposed to the metaphor vehicle ‘control’ which was used to suggest being controlled’) occurs only once in the data, and is used to refer to families who have chosen to home-school their children.

A last metaphor grouping to consider is that of ‘commerce’. Metaphors grouped within this vehicle were used within both transcripts 1a and 1b, and were used to explore topics one (assessment and feedback practices); three (the awarding body); five (the institution); seven (lecturers) and ten (people opting out of the system). With reference to their own practices (topic seven), participants explained how they “sell” assessment activities to their students, by persuading students of given benefits. They explored how those opting out of the system did not “buy into” the curriculum offered by mainstream education and explored how they “spend” time on assessment activities. They discussed the extent to which their work is “valued” by the awarding body, by the institution and by students.

5.1.2.3 Interpretive metaphor synthesis

The interpretive synthesis conveys the participants’ use of an extended ‘journey’ metaphor to describe their professional practices. It was constructed by the researcher and approved by the participants (see table 5.2 for participant responses).
When the participants meet to discuss their professional practice, their main focus is on their learners, and the journeys that they take with their learners. These journeys are to a wide variety of destinations, chosen by the individual learners. Lecturers signpost the most accessible pathways available to their learners, and provide stepping-stones to assist learners to reach their chosen location. Lecturers craft tools to support and assist their learners on these journeys, removing stumbling blocks and preventing them from feeling discomfort. They tailor each journey for each individual learner, so as to approach the destination smoothly and to ensure the pathway is accessible.

Lecturers pride themselves on the ways in which they can gauge the appropriate path for each learner. They use their skills and their local knowledge to move their learners forwards and to support learners to explore their surroundings. They measure the distances that they must cover, encourage their learners around gaps on the path, and provide assistance when learners encounter stumbling blocks along the way. They hold their learners up when learners feel they are drowning.

However, lecturers also discuss the struggles that they encounter whilst shielding the learners from discomfort on their journeys. They believe that the support that they can provide is restricted, and they feel trapped and confined by the expectations of those around them, including the learners themselves. They feel isolated in their professional landscape, and feel the threat of powerful forces that may engulf or submerge them. They scan the horizon for monsters that may prevent them from getting their learners to their chosen destinations. Sometimes the journeys feel like uphill struggles – sometimes it feels like all learners are trying to climb to the peak of the highest mountain – and lecturers sense the threats that may pull them all down.

But the lecturers are skilled and adaptable. They build supports that can bring their learners up to the right level, and in doing so they empower their learners to reach their destinations. The lecturers can navigate even when there is no clear map, and can negotiate any absence or lack in the landscape. The lecturers support and empower each other at every challenge.

Cameron et al. (2009, p. 71) assert that “metaphoricity depends on the evolving discourse context”, and that there is a fluid interaction between language and thinking: “what is said both reflects and affects thinking”. What is significant about this interpretive synthesis is that it was constructed using data collected from two meetings: action research meetings 1a and 1b. The fact that all participants responded positively to this interpretive synthesis (see table 5.2 for participant responses) suggests that the ideas, attitudes and values conveyed within it were not significantly influenced by the discourse which occurred within the meetings, but instead are held independently, or were held by participants prior to the first action research meetings.

Table 5.2 Participant responses to the interpretive metaphor synthesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive responses</th>
<th>Negative responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes I like this... your blurb makes a lot of sense</td>
<td>I shy away a little from how much it generalises about what lecturers do (if I’ve not misunderstood). Perhaps that’s the essential weakness of the metaphor, that while it provides wonderfully bright images they are</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.1.2.4 Conclusion: metaphor analysis

The qualitative exploration of the metaphor vehicles in section 5.1.2.2, above, suggests that participants shared feelings of restriction and of being controlled within their practice. This aligns with the outcomes of the CGT analytical process (section 5.1.1) – the use of the words ‘restriction’, ‘tension’ and ‘lack of coherence between systems’ within the final categories aligns with the ideas, attitudes and values we can see from the participants’ uses of metaphor. The metaphor analysis was conducted as a means of triangulating the findings constructed from the CGT analytical process; the alignment that we see here provides appropriate confirmation that the interpretation of the findings as articulated within section 5.1.1 is valid.

5.2 Relating these findings to the research questions.

This grounded theory qualitative study seeks to explain the factors which have an impact on the concepts of professional learning and assessment in the Scottish FE context, aiming to answer the following research questions (RQs):

- **Research question (RQ) one**: what factors have an impact on lecturers’ professional learning, in a further education (FE) learning context?
- **RQ two**: how do these factors impact on lecturers’ implementation and development of assessment practices, in a further education (FE) learning context?
- **RQ three**: to what extent can an action research methodology contribute to professional learning practices in a further education (FE) learning context?

Table 5.3 provides an overview of the categories and focused codes, showing how they relate to each of the research questions. It should be noted that not all of the focused codes proved relevant to the research questions. Those that did not contribute to the research questions have been kept in table 5.3, but will not be mentioned within the subsequent discussion within this chapter.

**Table 5.3: Relating the categories and focused codes to the research questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Focused codes</th>
<th>Research question one: Which factors have an impact on professional learning (PL)</th>
<th>Research question two: How these factors impact upon assessment practices</th>
<th>Research question three: Aspects of action research methodology that contribute to PL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think the metaphor thing is great actually .... and so I'm off on a new adventure with different monsters and challenges! Well done</td>
<td>inherently fuzzy around the edges (how's that for a metaphor!)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category one: serving multiple stakeholders</td>
<td>Multiple requirements within lecturers’ role</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of coherence between systems</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment to the detriment of learning</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension between curriculum and FE practice</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category two: isolated practice</td>
<td>Unshared perspectives</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of trust in awarding body</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working without clarity</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistent support</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited trust in institution</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category three: feeling restricted</td>
<td>Institutional restrictions on practice</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrictive requirements of awarding body</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invisible restrictions</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category four: perceptions of professionalism</td>
<td>Taking responsibility</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a wide lens to view practice</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working as individuals</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to use professional judgement</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category five: support structures</td>
<td>Observing practice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefitting from dialogue</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging action research meetings as support</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefitting from teacher education courses</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of others</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.1 Findings related to research question one: the factors that have an impact on professional learning (PL)

Throughout the data analysis and collection period, it was clear that all lecturers were engaged in PL activities. Theoretical sampling, as appropriate to the grounded theory methodology, meant that the researcher could direct questions relating to PL to each of the participants; it is interesting to note that all participants were fully engaged in PL activities within their teaching, regardless of factors such as level of experience, age, gender, attitude towards institution, curriculum area, qualification level. It is particularly interesting given that PL was not the original focus of this research; the original call for participants would not necessarily have resulted in participants interested in the subject itself, given that it was not an explicit part of the original focus.

Although the findings explored within section 5.1 suggest that PL is a central feature of the participants’ individual professional practice, they also suggest that, paradoxically, participants were unwilling, or unable, to engage in dialogue about the PL in which they engaged. This section will explore both the factors which supported the participants’ engagement in PL, and the factors which restricted engagement in PL and dialogue about it.

5.2.1.1 Factors which support Professional Learning (PL)

One factor which supports the professional learning of participants is their commitment to improving their professional practice in order to support their learners and fulfil their professional responsibilities to their learners. We can frame this commitment in terms of a “learner-centred” attitude (Bremner, 2021). The focused codes within the category perceptions of professionalism, e.g. ‘taking responsibility’ and ‘working as individuals’ are indicative of this commitment; participants were able to provide examples of actions that they take as individuals and specific ways in which they demonstrated responsibilities. Participants referred to the frequent reflection in which they engaged, and the ways in which they acted upon this reflection in order to make improvements to their practice. This commitment suggests that participants are engaging in PL according to Education Scotland’s definition, whereby PL focuses on “change for improvement” and requires lecturers to “challenge and question to ensure development and progress” (Education Scotland, no date). The findings, specifically those identified within the category seeking change, demonstrate that lecturers both challenge and question current practices, and are able to identify specific ways in which change would improve practice.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that another factor which supports the PL of participants is the extent to which participants can make their own decisions about the PL in which they engage, as relevant to their learners and their classes. This is in part due to a belief held by the participants that, as professionals, it is not possible to focus on student attainment without considering wider issues to do with student motivation, or previous learning experiences. The participants articulated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>seeking change</td>
<td>Desire for change in FE landscape</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling supported to enact change</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lecturers working collaboratively</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not believing change is possible</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category: desire for change in FE landscape</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling supported to enact change</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers working collaboratively</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not believing change is possible</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.1.2 Factors which restrict Professional Learning (PL)

One factor which restricts the professional learning of participants is the extent to which participants can make their own decisions about the PL in which they engage, as relevant to their learners and their classes. This is in part due to a belief held by the participants that, as professionals, it is not possible to focus on student attainment without considering wider issues to do with student motivation, or previous learning experiences. The participants articulated
a belief, encompassed within the category *perceptions of professionalism*, that they would need to vary their practice to suit the needs of their specific learners or groups – and that they would need the flexibility to develop their practice as individuals in order to do so effectively. Again, these ideas are linked to a learner-centred attitude towards their role.

The category *support structures* identifies two further factors which support lecturers to engage in PL: collaboration with others, and the positive support participants gain from colleagues and line managers. Within the literature related to PL, there is an emphasis on the importance of dialogue and social interaction between members of the community. Stoll and Kools (2016, p. 10) suggest that “for a learning culture to emerge, schools need to create structures for regular dialogue”. The findings within this category confirm that this is true within the FE context: the participants demonstrated a belief that dialogue between colleagues had a positive impact on their individual practice, and was a positive form of PL in terms of providing opportunities for sharing ideas, sharing good practice, and receiving advice. The participants explored how dialogue between colleagues allows lecturers to seek clarification about their practice and to receive suggestions from other colleagues. Dialogue was also seen as a mechanism for allowing lecturers a space for questioning another’s practice, and opportunities for ongoing dialogue contribute to a perception of PL as a process in which lecturers engage. This category therefore supports the suggestion that the extent to which lecturers have opportunities for dialogue is a factor which will impact upon their PL.

### 5.2.1.2 Factors which restrict professional learning.

However, as was explored within the second-phase literature review (chapter four), PL is widely considered to be “contextually situated” (Opfer and Pedder, 2011, p. 377) and “intrinsic to the contexts within which and with which the individual interacts” (Jurasaite-Harbison and Rex, 2010, p. 268). Relevant to this exploration of the factors that impact upon professional learning is the participants’ belief that the context within which they work is neither singular nor straightforward. This finding, most obviously articulated within the category ‘serving multiple stakeholders’ suggests that PL for lecturers within the FE sector does not have a steady contextual foundation on which it can be based. This belief in the multiplicity of the FE context was demonstrated through the participants’ discussions about the multiple agencies, organisations and systems involved in the FE context, and suggests that it is appropriate to use Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015)’s metaphor of a landscape of practice (as discussed within the second-phase literature review) to consider the FE context in terms of this “complex landscape” (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015, p. 15).

The multiplicity within this ‘complex landscape’ results in feelings of isolation, as articulated within the category *isolated practice*. This can be seen as a factor which restricts participants’ PL. The focused codes within this category suggest that the participants feel distanced from other members of the landscape and community, in that they have “different regimes of competence, commitments, values, repertoires and perspectives” (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015, p. 17). As detailed within the second-phase literature review (chapter four), Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015, p. 19) assert that learning is not “merely the acquisition of knowledge”, but “is the becoming of a person who inhabits the landscape with an identity whose dynamic construction reflects our trajectory through that landscape”. The participants’ feelings of isolation are therefore another factor which impacts upon their PL – this feeling of isolation will limit the engagement that lecturers will have within the landscape, and therefore limit the PL that can take place.

Within this wider landscape of practice, it was not merely the participants’ sense of isolation that prevented them from engaging in PL. The findings articulated within section 5.1 also demonstrate the participants’ understandings of tension between these various communities within the
landscape of practice. One such tension is that between the requirements of the FE sector and the requirements of the curriculum. Another tension is apparent within the requirement for lecturers to both facilitate learning and to assess that learning, suggesting that one key process is done to the detriment of the other. These ideas of tension are articulated within the category serving multiple stakeholders (section 5.1.1.1) and can be seen as a further factor which impacts upon lecturers’ PL, given that the literature suggests that it is the lecturers’ engagement with their landscape and community of practice that supports their PL.

The idea of multiplicity was also evident within the participants’ understanding of the role of a lecturer itself. Participants demonstrated their belief that they are required to adapt their practice according to the student group, subject or level with which they are working, and that they are required to work towards multiple outcomes and multiple requirements simultaneously. These ideas, consistent with the learner-centred attitudes described within Bremner (2021), were encompassed within the category serving multiple stakeholders, particularly in terms of the focused codes ‘lack of coherence between systems’ and ‘multiple requirements within lecturers’ role’. That the demands on one lecturer may be entirely different to the demands on others within their community of practice is a factor which restricts lecturers’ PL, because, again, it limits the extent to which participants can engage with a community of lecturers, and therefore limits the extent to which participants can engage with professional learning itself.

Although the participants were individually engaged in PL, and could identify factors within their context that supported PL, participants could also demonstrate resistance to PL. As stated within section 5.1.1.2, participants were ‘unwilling to engage in conversations about ways to improve their practice’, and ‘cautious about producing guidelines about good practice in formative assessment’. This suggests a tension within the participants’ perceptions of PL: that it is something that they value enough to engage in privately, but something that they are reluctant to discuss or explore publicly. Of particular interest within these findings was the idea that participants were reluctant to contribute to discussions regarding ‘best practice’ – even when it was their work that was being described as best practice – for fear that the innovation would become a “structured tick box” that “everyone has to comply with”. These findings were communicated within the focused code ‘fear of future restrictions’ which, when combined with the focused code ‘working as individuals’, suggests the participants’ fear that any public discussion of their PL might result in future restrictions on their individual practice and on the practices of their colleagues. For example, participants were concerned that the results of PL activities working towards ‘best practice’ would potentially become abstracted away from the context in which they originated, and that a requirement to adopt such ‘best practice’ measures within a different context would potentially prevent lecturers from working effectively for their learners. These ideas clearly contribute towards our understanding of the factors which have an impact on PL within the FE context and aligns with literature which criticises PL that has been abstracted away from its context, for example Opfer and Pedder (2011).

5.2.1.3 Summary:
This section has outlined the factors which both support and restrict professional learning for lecturers within the Scottish FE context. A summary of these factors can be found within table 5.4, below.

Table 5.4: Factors which support and restrict PL within the Scottish FE context
In the following section, these factors will be explored with reference to their impact on assessment practices within the Scottish FE context.

5.2.2 Findings which relate to research question two: how these factors impact upon assessment practices.

Research question two explores how the factors identified within RQ 1 impact on lecturers’ implementation and development of assessment practices, in a further education (FE) learning context. As explored within section 2.2.1, this research takes a ‘learning-focused’ (e.g. Winstone and Carless, 2020) approach to assessment, which views assessment as embedded into all aspects of a lecturers’ professional practice. Allal (2013, p. 20) asserts that teachers use professional judgement in “all areas of their activity”, making specific mention of “when they carry out formative and summative assessment”. ‘Professional judgement’ is defined as judgement “informed by the professional knowledge acquired through experience and through training” (Allal, 2013, p. 20), thereby highlighting the link between PL as explored in RQ 1 and the concept of assessment. Allal (2013) also confirms the link between assessment and a CoP; drawing on Wenger (1998), Allal (2013, p. 22) takes a “situated perspective” which views “even individual cognitive acts carried out by a professional in isolation...to be profoundly shaped by the collective practices of a professional community”. This justifies the link between the factors which impact on lecturers’ PL, as explored in RQ 1 (and summarised in table 5.4, above) and lecturers’ assessment practices, which is the focus of RQ 2.

5.2.2.1 Factors which support professional learning: how do these impact upon assessment practices?

5.2.2.1.1 A commitment to supporting students

As articulated within section 5.2.1, the participants demonstrated a commitment to support their students and to fulfil their professional responsibilities to their learners. This commitment was articulated most strongly within the category *perceptions of professionalism*, and is clearly related to this second research question. That participants were able to easily make links between their commitment to support students and their assessment practices may be partially due to the fact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors which support professional learning within the Scottish FE context</th>
<th>Factors which restrict professional learning within the Scottish FE context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers’ commitment to support their students, within a learner-centred attitude towards their role</td>
<td>Feelings of isolation, which limit the engagement that lecturers can have with the wider landscape of the FE context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers being able to make their own decisions about the PL in which they engage.</td>
<td>The multiplicity within the FE context, and the tensions between the multiple communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing collaboration and dialogue with others, which both provides support and creates an environment in which PL is a process in which lecturers engage.</td>
<td>The multiplicity within the role of a lecturer, and the requirement to adapt practice to meet the individual student group, which reduces the extent to which lecturers can engage with a community of practice made up of lecturers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive support from colleagues and line managers.</td>
<td>The possibility that ‘best practice’ might be imposed on all lecturers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that the focus of this research project had originally been on assessment; participants were primed
to discuss ideas relating to assessment prior to the meetings, and were therefore able to easily
illustrate their thoughts about their professional practice with reference to assessment.

Nonetheless, the findings within this category demonstrate that participants take responsibility for
their assessment practices in order to ensure a positive learning process for their learners. For
example, within the group meetings participants discussed:

- Instances of when they had decided to rewrite the summative assessment materials
  produced by the SQA. There were many reasons given for this, including because the
  participants perceived the assessment instruments to be unclear or not well matched to the
  learning outcomes of the qualification; because they perceived the assessment instruments
  to be based on out of date subject content; because they wanted to align the assessment
  instruments with other units that their students were undertaking so as to reduce the
  assessment ‘burden’ on learners.
- The responsibility participants take for recording participants’ attainment or engagement in
  formative assessment situations. In some instances, this required participants to create
  their own recording documentation.
- Situations where participants made changes to the established learning processes to allow
  them to determine whether learners are ready for assessments – including changing delivery
  mechanisms from whole-class delivery to one-to-one delivery; agreeing extra contact time;
  collaborating with colleagues to team-teach in order to support achievement.

5.2.2.1.2 Working as individuals to choose their own focus.
Within the conversations noted above, the participants specifically referred to the ways in which
they worked as individuals, using their professional judgement, to adapt the assessment instruments
and processes to ensure their relevance to their learners. The importance of working as an
individual, articulated within section 5.2.1 as a factor which supports the professional learning of
lecturers, is illustrated within this discussion of assessment. This was particularly evident within the
category perceptions of professionalism, which was in part constructed from the focused code
‘working as individuals’, outlined in section 5.1.2.4. In this category, participants outlined the
benefits of working individually in order to meet the needs of their learners and groups.
Participants welcomed opportunities to work flexibly and with autonomy within the assessment
processes in order to meet the needs of their specific learners.

5.2.2.1.3 Ongoing collaboration and dialogue with others.
Equally, the last example within section 5.2.1 refers to the ways in which participants collaborated
with colleagues, which is another factor that supports professional learning and impacts upon
lecturers’ assessment practices. As articulated within the category seeking change, despite their
focus on working as individuals, participants also perceived ongoing collaboration and dialogue to
have a positive impact on the ways in which they implemented assessment processes. Participants
referred to collaborative activities in which they had previously engaged, such as redesigning the
assessment instruments to include criteria for more than one module, and also to collaborative
activities in which they hoped to or planned to engage. There is a tension between the ideas
articulated within this section, and those which relate to section 5.2.2.1.2, in which ‘working as
individuals’ is also a factor which supports concepts of PL and assessment. This suggests that the
development of assessment practices is complex.
5.2.2.1.4 Positive support from line managers and colleagues.
Within the category seeking change, the participants demonstrated the extent to which they believe change to be necessary within the assessment systems and assessment practices. As discussed, above, participants took responsibility for making changes to various aspects within the assessment process, and opportunities for collaboration and dialogue with colleagues supported them to do so. A related factor which was articulated within the category seeking change is that some participants felt supported to implement such change. For example, they discussed the positive impact of support from line managers and colleagues, which allowed them to develop and improve assessment practices. However, the findings indicate that this was not universally the case within the participant group: the category seeking change was also constructed from data in which the participants discussed the extent to which they acted independently to develop and extend practices. For some participants, implementing such change required them to act contrary to institutional guidelines.

5.2.2.2 Factors which restrict professional learning: how do these impact upon assessment practices?
As noted within the initial phase literature review (chapter two), Price et al. (2012, p. 86) state that teaching staff need to be “encouraged to actively engage” with other stakeholders in the assessment ‘landscape’ “in order to gain a thorough and deep understanding of assessment purposes, processes and standards”. It is with this statement in mind that we explore how the factors that restrict professional learning, as identified in research question one, impact upon the assessment practices of lecturers working within the Scottish FE context.

5.2.2.2.1 A sense of multiplicity within the role of a lecturer.
Within chapter 5.2.1, the multiplicities within the role of a lecturer were shown to be a barrier to professional learning, in terms of the extent to which lecturers feel unable to share or discuss their practice with others. Thinking specifically about assessment practices, we can also view this sense of multiplicity within the role of a lecturer as a barrier to lecturers’ engagement with the “local assessment mores” (Price et al., 2012, p. 86). As articulated within the category serving multiple stakeholders, participants specifically referred to the ways in which their assessment practices varied depending on the demands of the qualification being taught. The findings here suggest that dialogue between lecturers, which Price et al. (2012) view as necessary for “a thorough and deep understanding of assessment”, will be difficult to facilitate within the Scottish FE context, especially across different subject areas and qualifications.

This idea was further illustrated by the fact that there was no single or easy definition of terms associated with assessment shared between the participants within this study. For example, one participant rejected the term ‘formative assessment’ for use when describing informal formative assessment, explaining that “I don’t think so much of the other [informal formative assessment] as being ‘formative assessment’, I think of it as ‘feedback’”. Further discussion around this point revealed that the participant meant feedback from the learners to the lecturer; although this meaning was limited to one participant, it highlights the different ways in which common words can be used.

Common to all participants was an underpinning understanding of formative assessment as almost synonymous with teaching itself. Participants referred to engaging in formative assessment practices as “an ongoing thing”; “as a way of teaching”; and “as a learning tool”. Also common to all participants was the need to distinguish between formal formative assessment and informal formative assessment – formal being “a structured thing, you know, you would have a kind of marking guide...” and informal relating to the formative assessments done through, for example, class activities and discussion.
However, this is not to suggest any deficiency in the participants’ understanding of assessment within their own professional practice. Price et al. (2012, p. 10) define assessment literacy as “an appreciation of the purpose and process of assessment”, which the individual participants all held and could articulate clearly for their learners, and for the programmes within which they taught.

The participants were in agreement that assessment practices differ between practitioners, depending on the type of course being taught, and depending on the type of summative assessment used within that course. Participants also suggested that formative assessment practices would vary depending on the lecturer and their teaching style. In what was a clear theme within the participants’ discussions and meetings, participants were resistant towards the idea of an articulation of ‘best practice’ in formative assessment, and were resistant to the idea of being asked to standardise formative assessment practices.

5.2.2.2 A sense of multiplicity within the FE context – and tension between these different communities.

The category serving multiple stakeholders confirms ideas articulated within the initial phase literature review (chapter two): that the FE context itself is made up of a large number of communities. As articulated within this category, participants believed that there was tension between these different communities, and used examples from the assessment process to illustrate this idea of tension. For example, the participants within this research believed that the requirements of the awarding body (SQA) made it impossible to uphold the emphasis placed by the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) on developing a learner’s skills and capacities. The participants’ discussions of their assessment practices suggest that they would tend to align with a learning-focused model of assessment, as explored within section 2.4.1, which would also be in line with the CfE’s values and intentions. However, the assessment structures (e.g. pass/fail mechanism) and awarding body requirements (e.g. focus on summative assessment) do not allow lecturers to support a learner’s “longitudinal development”, which is a characteristic of the learning-focused model. This tension caused the participants significant frustration within their practice. The sense of multiplicity and incoherence across the FE sector as a whole, as illustrated within this example, gives a sense of lecturers trying to navigate multiple discourses, involving multiple actors, and trying to achieve multiple aims for learners at multiple academic levels.

As explored within the initial phase literature review, Winstone and Boud (2019, p. 413) suggest that a lecturer within a Higher Education (HE) context can choose to align “primarily with a transmission- or learning-focused model” of assessment. This choice impacts upon the way in which feedback is implemented. But the findings within this category suggest that Winstone and Boud (2020)’s assertion that lecturers can make such a choice is not relevant to lecturers within the FE context. Assessment within the FE sector cannot align with a learning-focused model, if they feel that the assessment processes are detrimental to the learning process. The conflicting aims, values and requirements of the CfE and those of the awarding body mean that lecturers’ practices cannot align with either a transmission- or a learning-focused model. This finding is a further factor which impacts upon the implementation of assessment practices, and therefore develops our understanding of RQ 2.

Relevant to this sense of multiplicity is the participants’ understanding of how assessments are used by different communities within the FE context. Section 1.1.1 suggested that ‘the language and terminology used to explain a given concept may differ between the multiple bodies’ within the college sector, due to the ‘multiple discourses with which institutions, lecturers and learners...must engage’. The different ways in which the term ‘assessment’ was used by participants was an
example of this. As the AR meetings progressed, a ‘glossary’ of definitions was produced (Appendix H), to highlight the differences in language and terminology used by the participants, and to compare these definitions to those produced by the various other communities within the college ‘landscape’. This glossary will be referred to again within the discussion chapter.

As discussed above, participants differed in terms of the ways in which they used assessment, depending on the purpose that they were using it to fulfil. The purpose changed depending on whose needs they were aiming to meet: 1) their own needs, 2) the needs of the learners, and 3) the requirements of the awarding body, as will be discussed in the sub-sections below.

5.2.2.2.2.1 Fulfilling the needs of lecturers.
All but one of the participants discussed how they used formative assessment as a mechanism for gathering information about the learning that was taking place. This was the most common purpose of formative assessment, according to participants. One participant explained how formative assessment is used to “build up a picture of how the students are getting on”; another described how “you can kind of gauge where people are” through formative assessment. Another participant explained how formative assessment is “my way of seeing who has and has not got gaps in their learning”.

Participants also explained how they used formative assessment to gather information about their own practice. They used it as a means of “gauging my communication”, and as “a good way to evaluate your own teaching practice”.

5.2.2.2.2.2 Fulfilling the needs of learners.
To a lesser extent, participants discussed their use of formative assessment as a tool for learners to use, to enable them to understand their own progress. Participants explained how formative assessments were used to “show them their gaps in their knowledge”, and “for the students to learn from it”. For at least one participant, their understanding of formative assessment developed over the course of the AR meetings to include this use of formative assessment.

Participants also used formative assessment as a tool to support learners to develop an identity as a successful learner, which is one of the ‘four capacities’ (NoTosh, 2022) on which the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) in Scotland is based – “I use the [formative] assessments as a kind of tool to show them that they are responsible”; “it’s also about the student taking on some responsibility for their own learning”. This was echoed by another participant in another meeting, who explained how formative assessment was “less for me to measure the student than for me to give the students a measure of where they are”.

5.2.2.2.2.3 Fulfilling the needs of the awarding body.
The third use of formative assessment was to allow lecturers to record evidence of learner attainment, to satisfy awarding body requirements should it be required. One participant explained how a learner had “pulled out right at the last minute and because I had done these [formative] assessments all the way through, I had evidence to submit to the awarding body”. This idea was echoed by other participants – one participant explained how they used formative assessment “not to cover our backs, but just to make sure that you know, we had enough evidence to present to the SQA because they kept changing the rules”. One participant’s response provides us with important context for this reference to these ‘changing rules’: “we might be using the formative assessment as a summative assessment, if the horrid Covid comes back”. The reference here is to the Covid-19 pandemic which coincided with the data collection period of this research, and is explained in more detail within section 2.1.1.
5.2.2.2.3 Feelings of isolation.
A further factor which restricts lecturers’ professional learning within the FE context is a feeling of isolation, as explored within section 5.2.1. This factor also furthers our understanding of research question two. As explored within section 4.5, we can view assessment itself as a “boundary encounter” (Wenger Trayner et al., 2015, p. 17) between the different communities of practice within the FE landscape. Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015, p. 17) assert that “the boundaries between practices are never unproblematic” because “they always involve the negotiation of how competence of a community of practices becomes relevant (or not) to that of another”. The category isolated practice was constructed from data which demonstrated the participants’ belief that different communities within the landscape of practice had different priorities for and requirements of assessment.

Price et al. (2012, p. 86) suggest that lecturers need to be “encouraged to actively engage” with other stakeholders in the assessment ‘landscape’ “in order to gain a thorough and deep understanding of assessment purposes, processes and standards”. Price et al. (2012, p. 86) describe the community of stakeholders that will support gaining this understanding as “a supportive community of practice”. The findings within the category isolated practice suggest that lecturers do not feel part of a supportive community – instead, the findings suggest that participants felt distanced from other stakeholders within the FE context, and, in some instances, actively distrusted the priorities or requirements of these other stakeholders.

The category isolated practice also encompasses the participants’ perceptions that aspects of their practice were unclear; they discussed their confusion regarding aspects of assessment and the lack of clarity within the guidance produced by other communities within the landscape. The understanding we have of assessment as a boundary encounter is justified here – Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015, p. 17) assert that “even common words and objects are not guaranteed to have continuity of meaning across a boundary”. Again, the glossary document referred to within section 5.2.2.2 demonstrates this idea; the findings within this category indicate that dialogue within the landscape of practice is not easy to facilitate – which will negatively impact on the lecturers’ implementation of assessment practices in the FE context.

5.2.2.2.4 The possibility that best practice might be imposed upon all lecturers.
Within section 5.2.1.2, the participants revealed their reluctance to engage in discussions about best practice, for fear that the ideas would be taken out of context and imposed upon all lecturers. This idea impacts upon the assessment practices of lecturers. Within the category perceptions of professionalism, participants specifically referred to their desire to use their own professional judgement within the assessment processes and their decisions not to do so “from fear of the SQA”.

5.2.3 Aspects of action research methodology that contribute to Professional Learning (RQ three)
As noted within section 5.1.1.4, the extent to which participants took responsibility for the development of practice changed during the research process, from a focus on responsibility for their own individual practices, to a wider responsibility for student learning across the institution during the fourth meeting. Furthermore, the findings articulated within section 5.1.1.5 include participants’ explicit praise for the action research meetings – participants perceived the meetings as valuable ways of engaging in PL. These findings emphasise the value that participants attributed to the AR meetings.

These findings resulted in the development of this third research question: it can be suggested that, over time, the action research meetings facilitated a shift towards third-person action research
(Reason and Bradbury, 2011, p. 6) which “aims to create a wider community of inquiry”. The following sections will explore the aspects of the AR methodology which contributed to this change.

5.2.3.1 Being able to make decisions about the direction of Professional Learning opportunities.

As explored within section 5.1.1.4, participants were unanimous in their belief that assessment could not be discussed without consideration of wider issues. The original aim of this action research study was to improve or develop assessment practices within the institution at which this research took place – the research focus was strictly on assessment practices. But the participants were clear in their belief that such a focus was inappropriate. Instead, the participants demonstrated their belief that PL opportunities need to recognise that the learning process is made up of multiple, interlinking factors. This is a significant finding in terms of this third research question, confirming that the conceptualisation of PL as a process-product approach, as outlined in section 4.1.1 (those with a focus on “specific activities…in isolation from the complex teacher professional learning environment” (Opfer and Pedder, 2011, p. 377)) are inappropriate for use within the Scottish FE context.

As articulated within chapter three, the AR meetings through which data was collected were structured around open questions which allowed participants to deviate from the initial focus on assessment. Furthermore, as explained within section 5.1.1.4.2, a decision was made during later meetings not to steer the participants’ conversation back to the initial focus on assessment. Participating in this form of PL therefore relieved the participants of the fear they had expressed in section 5.1.1.2: that they would have something else to ‘comply’ with. Instead, the action research meetings became a “safe dialogic space” (Haneda et al., 2016, p. 61), which allowed for the expression of multiple viewpoints” (Haneda et al., 2016, p. 61).

5.2.3.2 Ongoing collaboration and dialogue with others

As discussed within chapter three, the action research meetings were structured to allow participants to engage in dialogue, to ask questions of each other and to further their knowledge through the joint exploration of issues. The data that contributed to the category support structures suggest that participants valued, benefitted from, and came to rely on these opportunities for dialogue within the action research meetings. Participants explicitly referred to the benefits of obtaining the perspective of someone outside their own curriculum area, and discussed dialogue in terms of the opportunities it gave for asking questions and discussing solutions. These findings suggest that participants appreciated the action research meetings in part because of the ongoing opportunities that they provided to ask questions of lecturers from other curriculum areas. The participants were able to “consider different perspectives and pose increasingly focused questions”, which for Stoll and Kools (2017, p. 9, drawing on Earl and Katz (2006)), is a key part of professionalism. Codes relating to dialogue within this category also demonstrate that the participants appreciated the opportunities for gaining different perspectives within these action research meetings.

5.2.3.3 The potential for change

The findings from this research included some contradictory ideas in terms of the participants’ perceptions of the potential for change. The findings reported within the category seeking change include the focused codes ‘desire for change’ and ‘feeling supported to enact change’, which are contradicted by a belief that meaningful change was not possible. However, of relevance to RQ three is a shift that could be seen from the second AR meetings onwards, whereby participants started to identify areas in which they could collaborate in order to change (and improve) their practices. The AR meetings facilitated a development in the ways in which participants viewed their relationships with other lecturers, and the ways in which they viewed collaboration. This category
suggests that collaboration is useful to lecturers if they are able to move away from the feelings of isolation described within the category ‘isolated practice’.

5.3 Embedding these findings into my conceptual framework.
Figure 5.8 (below) shows how the findings that have been explored within this chapter were embedded into my conceptual framework.

![Figure 5.8: Embedding the findings into my conceptual framework.](image)

Within this visual articulation of my conceptual framework, ‘limiting’ PL opportunities are represented with a circle, suggesting that they may often by discrete or isolated events. By contrast, PL opportunities that are able to overcome this sense of isolation are represented with an arrow, to emphasise the importance of PL as an ongoing process, rather than a discrete event.

This visual articulation also serves to emphasise the link between the concepts of PL and assessment.
Chapter six: Discussion.

6.1 Introduction

Chapter five articulated the findings resulting from this grounded theory research (section 5.1), and used the findings to respond to the three research questions (section 5.2). Within this sixth chapter, the grounded theory constructed from this research will be set out in a series of six connected statements. This aligns with Charmaz (2006, p. 164)’s guidance to use “clear statements” to articulate a grounded theory. Subsequent sections within this chapter will then consider the impact of this grounded theory by applying these statements to the literature, showing how they develop and build on current understandings of the concepts of Professional Learning (PL) and assessment, and, more specifically, how they extend what is already known about PL and assessment within the Scottish educational contexts, by considering them specifically within the context of Further Education in Scotland.

6.2 The grounded theory

(1) The FE context is an example of a landscape characterised by multiplicity, which is a concept of central importance to this grounded theory. Within a landscape that is characterised by multiplicity, it is too easy to see one’s professional practice as separate from the practice of others within the landscape; too easy to dismiss the work of others as irrelevant to one’s own. Lecturers within the FE context who perceive this multiplicity may view their professional practice as separate from the professional practice of other lecturers within their context.

(2) Drawing upon Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015)’s social theory of learning, learning is viewed as the becoming of a person who inhabits the landscape. The multiplicity within the FE context poses difficulties for lecturers in terms of the extent to which they can inhabit the landscape, which leads to feelings of isolation. This isolation serves to increase the extent to which lecturers see their practice as separate to that of their colleagues.

Statements one and two will interact to result in an ever-increasing sense of isolation and multiplicity, as demonstrated within figure 6.1. Drawing upon Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015)’s social theory of learning, we can suggest that this interaction between statements one and two poses difficulties for the construction of lecturers’ professional identity.

![Figure 6.1: Factors which restrict the construction of lecturers' professional identity.](image-url)

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(3) Professional learning opportunities that do nothing to combat this sense of isolation can be viewed as ‘limiting’ professional learning opportunities, in that they limit the extent to which practitioners can inhabit the landscape. Practitioners will neither be able to articulate ‘competence’ within their community of practice, or demonstrate ‘knowledgeability’ within their landscape of practice (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015). Such PL is not without value: it may support lecturers to gain new knowledge or skills, and may be of benefit to the learner groups with which lecturers work. However, ‘limiting’ PL is likely to be characterised by fear or by barriers, as lecturers work to protect their PL from being viewed by others.

(4) ‘Limiting’ professional learning may also serve to lock lecturers into a focus on their learners, which will deepen the feelings of isolation articulated within statement two.

(5) However, professional learning opportunities that are able to overcome this sense of isolation support lecturers to inhabit their professional landscape more effectively. This ‘social’ PL should be seen as an ongoing process, and is characterised by engagement and dialogue - not with learners, but with others within the community or landscape of practice.

(6) Furthermore, professional learning opportunities that can embed an action research ethos will serve to support lecturers to inhabit their professional landscape, strengthening their professional identities.

6.3 Relating this grounded theory to the literature.
This section will explore how the statements articulating the grounded theory relate to the literature. Within this section, the specific contributions to knowledge made by this thesis will be articulated.

6.3.1: Multiplicity in context

Statement one: the FE context is an example of a landscape characterised by multiplicity. Within a landscape that is characterised by multiplicity, it is too easy to see one’s professional practice as separate from the practice of others within the landscape; too easy to dismiss the work of others as irrelevant to one’s own. Lecturers within the FE context who perceive this multiplicity will view their practice as separate from the practice of others.

Statement one extends our understanding of the literature relating to teacher identity. Sherman and Teemant (2021a) suggest that “identity and power intersect in the conflict or accord of interpretive framework and roles” (p. 1470), where ‘interpretive framework’ is explained as “an articulation of teacher identities as teachers’ enactments of their values, beliefs, ideas and self-images” (p. 1466) in their professional context. For Sherman and Teemant (2021a, p. 1470) “if an interpretive framework accords with a role, we can consider this a nested identity position...there is equilibrium between identity and role”. In contrast to this, “in a discordant identity position, the subjective interpretive framework of an individual, specifically their framework of right and wrong, does not completely overlap with...the actions they are expected to carry out”. Figure 6.2, below, provides a visual representation of the nested and discordant identity positions.
The findings articulated within chapter five demonstrate that this articulation is too simplistic for use within a landscape that is characterised by multiplicity. For example, within the category serving multiple stakeholders, the focused codes ‘lack of coherence between systems’ and ‘multiple requirements within lecturers’ role’ explore the participants’ perceptions that they have more than one role – that they have to alter their teaching and assessment style depending on the student group or level, or the curriculum area or subject being taught – and that they are required to work towards multiple outcomes and multiple requirements simultaneously. Instead, the findings from this research suggest that Sherman and Teemant’s articulation should be extended to better represent the requirements of those working within a landscape that is characterised by multiplicity, as shown within figure 6.3, below.

We see here that there is no potential for lecturers to be in a ‘nested’ identity position, when there are multiple roles that they are required to fulfil. Instead, they are perpetually in a ‘discordant’ identity position.

Statement one, then, extends our understanding of Sherman and Teemant’s framework. It provides us with an understanding of the limits of this framework: an understanding of a practitioner being in a ‘nested’ or ‘discordant’ identity position is not applicable for those working within a landscape characterised by multiplicity. Given that PL is viewed as the becoming of a person who inhabits the landscape, we see that PL for those in this kind of landscape will be difficult: the findings from this
research show that their identity as someone who inhabits the landscape will always be ‘discordant’, given the multiple roles that they are required to fulfil.

6.3.2 Isolation within the FE context

Statement two: the multiplicity within the FE context poses difficulties for lecturers in terms of the extent to which they can inhabit the landscape, leading to feelings of isolation. This isolation serves to increase the extent to which lecturers see their practice as separate to that of their colleagues.

Statements one and two will interact to result in an ever-increasing sense of isolation and multiplicity, restricting the construction of their professional identity.

6.3.2.1 The impact of isolation on professional learning

Sherman and Teemant (2021a, p. 1470) suggest that those who are in a ‘discordant’ identity position will seek “resolution”: “either who the teachers are (identity) or what they do (role) must change”. That all participants engaged in PL activities suggests that the participants within this study opted to change the latter. This is articulated within the categories perceptions of professionalism and seeking change; focused codes ‘using a wide lens to view practice’, and ‘taking responsibility’ within the category perceptions of professionalism were constructed from data which showed participants creating resources and devising strategies that extended their “sphere of legitimate action” (Sherman and Teemant, 2021a, p. 8), in order to align with their ‘interpretive frameworks’. In doing so, the participants were engaging in agentive action (Sherman and Teemant (2021a, p. 5), which Toom et al. (2015, p. 616) define as a “willingness and capacity to act according to professional values, beliefs, goals and knowledge”.

Building on the ideas articulated within 6.3.1, statement two shows that the PL in which lecturers engage in order to resolve their “discordant identity position” means that lecturers will increasingly focus their practice on the needs of their individual learner cohorts. This separates their practice further from the practice of other lecturers who will, equally, be adapting their practice to the needs of their own cohorts. The result, as demonstrated within figure 6.4, is a restricting spiral which results in an increasing sense of dissonance and isolation from the practice of other lecturers.
6.3.2.2 The impact of isolation on assessment processes

We can suggest that PL which is done in isolation will not necessarily have an impact on the assessment practices in which lecturers engage. This is because teaching practitioners have to engage in both “social and cognitive processes” (Crisp, 2017, p. 21) in order to be able to judge the value of student work, which is an element of both formative and summative assessment practices. Hargeaves (2021) emphasises the social element by asserting that “if judgements were purely cognitive, they could be made by algorithms”. Unless lecturers’ PL includes development of these ‘social processes’, the literature therefore suggests that PL will not necessarily impact on lecturers’ assessment practices.

The category isolated practice suggests that lecturers do not engage in PL that aligns with Crisp (2017, p. 21)’s “social processes”. The findings articulated within chapter five provide reasons for this: the focused codes from which the category perceptions of professionalism was constructed explore how lecturers feel unable or unwilling to share their PL. This therefore suggests one barrier that prevents lecturers within the Scottish FE context from engaging in the types of PL that would have a positive impact upon their assessment practices – they may be able to engage in PL which supports the development of the relevant cognitive processes, but there are barriers evident within the category perceptions of professionalism which prevent them from developing the relevant social processes. Despite the fact that PL is a factor in lecturers’ professional lives, this category shows that it does not allow for the development of assessment practices.
6.3.3 ‘Limiting’ professional learning opportunities

Statement three: PL opportunities that do nothing to combat this sense of isolation can be viewed as ‘limiting’, in that they limit the extent to which practitioners can inhabit the landscape. Practitioners will neither be able to articulate ‘competence’ within their community of practice, nor demonstrate ‘knowledgeability’ within their landscape of practice (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015). Such PL is not without value: it may support lecturers to gain new knowledge or skills, and may be of benefit to the learner groups with which lecturers work. However, ‘limiting’ PL is likely to be characterised by fear or by barriers, as lecturers work to protect their PL from being viewed by others.

This statement must be considered at both levels: at the level of a community of practice (CoP), and at the level of a landscape of practice (LoP).

6.3.3.1 Community of Practice

At the level of the CoP, learning “is a process of identity formation” (Omidvar and Kislov, 2014, p. 267), which is a “dual” process, involving “realignment between the community-defined regime of competence and the individual experience of community members” (Omidvar and Kislov, 2014, p. 267, drawing on Wenger, 1998).

However, the findings from this grounded theory study suggest that, within the FE context, lecturers are unable to (re)align their practice with ideas of competence held by other lecturers. The category serving multiple stakeholders demonstrates that the professional demands placed on lecturers vary significantly depending on the group, level, subject or specific context in which the teaching is situated. This multiplicity prevents lecturers from articulating ideas of competence within a community of lecturers – because they do not perceive themselves to have a “joint enterprise” (Wenger, 1998, p. 72) towards which they are working. Furthermore, as shown within the category perceptions of professionalism, lecturers believe in the importance of adapting their practice to the needs of their specific teaching and learning situations. Lecturers who engage in ‘limiting’ PL activities will be further reducing their ability to articulate ideas of competence.

This finding impacts upon lecturers’ sense of identity. Given that learning is “the becoming of a person who inhabits the landscape” (Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 19), this finding also impacts upon the extent to which lecturers engage in PL. Correa et al. (2014, p. 449) assert that “discourse is the primary way in which identities are constructed”. Within this restricting spiral (figure 6.4), we see how lecturers’ increased engagement with the needs of their learners may jeopardize their engagement with a community of lecturers. As they tailor their practice more specifically to the needs of their own learners, they will see an increasing gap between their practice and that of their colleagues. This results in lecturers who do not perceive themselves to be part of a CoP with a “shared repertoire” (Wenger, 1998, p. 82) with other lecturers. For Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015, p. 14), a practitioner’s professional competence is defined by members of their community of practice; indeed, for Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015, p. 14), a “responsible practitioner” is one whose work “reflects the current competence of a community”. Wenger-Trayner et al. illustrate this idea with the example of medical doctors, whose professional actions are judged based on the extent to which their practice aligns with “the most current practice of the community”. Wenger-Trayner et al.
assert that, in this respect, “competence includes a social dimension”. It is “not merely an individual characteristic. It is something that is recognisable as competence by members of a community” (2015, p. 14).

The category serving multiple stakeholders, and its impact on the lecturers’ nested/discordant identities, as explored above, explains why lecturers consider themselves to be forced to extend their “sphere of legitimate action” (Sherman and Teemant, 2021a, p. 8) by engaging in ‘limiting’ PL opportunities. But, in doing so, lecturers risk moving too far from the accepted practices of their community of practice, and risk their membership within that community in doing so, as they move beyond that which the community recognises as competence. The “agentive action” (Sherman and Teemant, 2021a, p. 6) in which lecturers engage (see section 6.3.2.1) therefore causes lecturers to risk moving too far from the accepted practices of other lecturers – and to risk their membership within a CoP of lecturers - as they move beyond that which the community would recognise as ‘competence’.

6.3.3.2 Landscape of Practice

‘Limiting’ PL opportunities may also prevent lecturers from engaging with their wider landscape of practice. As stated within section 4.2, there are particular difficulties associated with working within a large landscape of practice, where members have “very, very thin membership” in multiple communities of practice (Omidvar and Kislov, 2014, p. 271). The concepts of multiplicity and isolation articulated thus far within this section suggest that the FE context is large enough to be problematic in this respect.

The concept of ‘knowledgeability’ is defined within Omidvar and Kislov (2014, p. 271) as “the state of the person with respect to a landscape”. Practitioners with knowledgeability have, according to Omidvar and Kislov, an understanding of “where their practice fits in the landscape” (2014, p. 271). The concepts of multiplicity and isolation, which lead to ‘limiting’ PL as shown above, result in lecturers having little ‘knowledgeability’ of their landscape of practice. As stated within section 4.1.2 those who do not have knowledgeability “have little ability…to contribute to the learning capability of the broader system” (Omidvar and Kislov, 2014, p.271).

Furthermore, the “agentive action” (Sherman and Teemant, 2021a, p. 6) in which lecturers engage has the potential to further isolate lecturers from the wider landscape of practice, as well as isolating them from a CoP made up of other lecturers. Within the landscape of practice, the code ‘lack of coherence between systems’ within the category serving multiple stakeholders suggests that the different requirements and practices within the landscape are in conflict. That there is tension between these requirements, that working to meet the demands of one stakeholder can be detrimental to the demands of another, and that participants perceive there to be a lack of coherence between them is evident within the focused codes within this category. If lecturers try to extend their sphere of influence by changing what they do, they risk moving too far from the accepted practices of one of the multiple stakeholders within the FE context – they risk decreasing the extent to which the other stakeholders within the landscape of practice have ‘knowledgeability’ of their practice.

This statement therefore extends our understanding of the difficulties that may occur if PL activities are considered only at the level of individual lecturers. Opfer and Pedder (2011, p. 378) suggest that PL must avoid “simplistic conceptualisations”, and literature which focuses on PL solely in terms of the activities undertaken by individuals is “underplaying the complexity of the problem”. Instead, drawing on the literature, they encourage a conceptualisation of PL “as a complex system rather than an event” (p. 378), and suggest that “any attempt to understand teacher professional learning
at only a subsystem level must be understood as partial, incomplete, and biased” (p. 379). This
grounded theory research extends Opfer and Pedder’s criticisms: not only will such attempts be
‘partial, incomplete and biased’, but they will also serve to prevent lecturers from engaging with
their communities or landscapes of practice, which will restrict the formation of their professional
identities.

6.3.3.3 The impact of ‘limiting’ PL opportunities on the assessment process

The importance of communities and landscapes of practice to the assessment process is well
documented within the literature. As stated within the initial phase literature review (chapter two),
a “thorough and deep understanding of assessment” can only be gained by those who are “active
members of a supportive community of practice in which they can ask questions of, and engage in
dialogue with, more experienced practitioners” (Price et al., 2012, p. 86). Price et al. (2012) do not
specify who the members of this CoP should be, but other research published by the corresponding
author which took place within the same institution (e.g. Price et al., 2007) refers to a social-
constructivist assessment process model which involves students being “actively engaged with every
stage of the assessment process”, including understanding “the criteria and standards being applied”
(Price et al., 2007, p. 145, drawing on Rust et al. (2005)). Applying this to the Scottish FE context
would require students to engage with communities across the landscape of practice – including, for
example, the SQA. We can therefore infer that Price et al. (2012)’s reference to ‘active members’
should, when translated to the Scottish FE context, include members of the wider landscape of
practice.

However, this grounded theory research shows that it cannot be assumed that lecturers within the
Scottish FE context are able to engage with their wider landscape of practice, nor can assumptions
be made regarding their engagement with other lecturers in a CoP. The category isolated practice
suggests that lecturers within this FE context are isolated from the community that could provide
such support. The focused code ‘working without clarity’ suggests that they are unable to get
answers to the questions they may have. We can therefore suggest that the “thorough and deep”
understanding of assessment that Price et al. are hoping for will remain even more problematic –
and perhaps unachievable - for lecturers within the Scottish FE context.

Drawing on Wenger (1998, p. 107)’s discussion of boundary practices and encounters, we can view
assessment in the Scottish FE context as a concept which “belong(s) to multiple practices”.
Assessment can be seen as a “nexus of perspective” which “serves multiple constituencies”, each of
whom holding “only partial control” of the concept (assessment) itself. Wenger-Strayner et al. (2015,
p. 17) assert that boundary “between practices are never unproblematic” because “they always
involve the negotiation of how competence of a community of practices becomes relevant (or not) to
that of another”. The glossary document (see appendix H) provides an example of this: we see the
extent to which lecturers’ understanding of the role of the awarding body does not align with the
view of other stakeholders or the awarding body itself.

Furthermore, within his exploration of student teachers within secondary schools, Johnston (2016,
p. 546) explores how student teachers need to develop an identity that allows them to take
advantage of the PL opportunities to which they have access. Johnston suggests that it is “the sense
of distance from core membership [of a CoP]” (2016, p. 546) which prevents student teachers from
developing this “practitioner identity” (p. 546), and that “being unable to bring one’s own purposes
and goals into alignment with those of the community” (p. 541) leads to “the experience of feeling
isolated”. Section 6.3.2 explores both the sense of isolation felt by lecturers and the impact of the
category serving multiple stakeholders, which suggests that there is no single purpose or goal with
which lecturers can align. But, for Johnston (2016, p. 546), exploring “the most effective ways of
helping all student teachers develop a sense of belonging to the schools to which they become affiliated” is a potential solution: Johnston assumes that, within the secondary school context, such a community with a ‘core membership’ is present. The findings articulated within chapter five question the existence of such a community within the FE context, which suggests further problems for the assessment practices of FE lecturers.

6.3.4 A focus on learners

Statement four: ‘limiting’ professional learning may also serve to lock lecturers into a focus on their learners, which will deepen the feelings of isolation articulated within statement two.

6.3.4.1 Who is the community?

This discussion has so far worked with the assumption found within much of the literature: that teaching practitioners belong to a community of practice made up of other teaching practitioners and professionals (e.g. Cuddapah and Clayton, 2011; Brouwer et al., 2011; Woodgate-Jones, 2012). However, the findings from this research challenge this assumption. These findings suggest that the participants within this study can be described as belonging to communities of practice primarily made up of the individual lecturers and their student groups. Evidence for this is particularly apparent within the interpretive metaphor synthesis (section 5.1.2.3), which was endorsed by participants as something which captured their thoughts and attitudes towards their work (see table 5.2). For example, the interpretive synthesis describes the “journeys that they [the lecturers] take with their learners”, and the ways in which lecturers “craft tools to support and assist their learners”, which align with the Wenger’s dimension of “mutual engagement” (Wenger, 1998, p. 73). Furthermore, another requirement for a community of practice is the “joint enterprise” (Wenger, 1998, p. 78) in which the community is engaged. We can view completion of the qualification which is being taught by the lecturer and learnt by the learner as the ‘joint enterprise’ in which the community engages. Wenger (1998, p. 78) asserts that this enterprise “is not joint in that everybody believes the same thing…but in that it is communally negotiated”. The focused code ‘multiple requirements within lecturers’ role’ within the category serving multiple stakeholders captures some of the negotiation in which lecturers and learners will engage in terms of the “joint enterprise” – for example, supporting students towards employment, towards further study, towards completion of the qualification.

This argument is supported by some categories constructed by the CGT analysis. For example, as described within section 5.1.1.4.4, participants emphasised the need to “mould their practice to suit the needs of their individual learners”. Furthermore, the focused code ‘working as individuals’ (section 5.1.1.4.3) emphasises the participants’ desire to separate their practice from that of their colleagues.

Pyrko et al. (2019, p. 484) assert that “groups of people who interact regularly because they care about the same real-life problems or hot topics and on this basis negotiate a shared practice” can be described as belonging to a community of practice. But within their paper focusing on “foundational education”, which they describe as “primary, secondary and initial vocational education” (2020, p. 8), Imants and der Wal suggest that teaching practitioners “work individually with (a) group(s) of students, rather isolated from their colleagues” for the “largest part of their working day” (2020, p. 4). The categories constructed within this research suggest that this sense of isolation, and this
feeling of wanting to adapt practice to meet the needs of individual groups of students, is true of lecturers within this Scottish FE context. Using the literature and the findings from this research, we can therefore question whether lecturers belong to a community of practice made up of other lecturers. Instead, as explained above, this grounded theory research provides evidence to suggest that, if lecturers belong to a community of practice, it is one made up of themselves and their own learners.

The consequences of this on lecturers’ professional practice warrants further consideration. Wenger et al. (2002, p. xv) describe how the “collective knowledge of any field” should be viewed as lacking “a stable core”; as such, Wenger et al. (2002, p. xv) explain how “knowledge, even explicit knowledge, must be constantly updated by people who understand the issues and appreciate the evolution of their field” – something that can only be achieved by people who “work as a community”. The references to “professional knowledge” (p.4) within the GTCS professional standards (GTCS, 2020) require lecturers to “understand(s) the breadth of political, social and economic drivers” (p.5), and refer to “national priorities” (p.5) and a “range of learning environments” (p.5). This professional knowledge is far beyond that which would be required for a community made up of a lecturer and their student cohort; the implication is therefore that the GTCS expect Wenger’s ‘community’ to be a community of lecturers. But it can be suggested that lecturers who have too strong a focus on a community comprising of themselves and their individual learner groups may restrict the development of a community of professional practice; lecturers with such a strong and specific focus on their learners may lose sight of the wider community of professionals around them. This restricts the extent to which they can engage in PL.

As discussed within section 4.3.2, the Scottish educational context has articulated a National Model of Professional Learning designed to “support education professionals to grow professionally and seek improvement in their practice” (Education Scotland, 2021). It can be asserted that this model is relevant to teaching practitioners across Scotland including lecturers within the FE context: this model is described as being relevant to education professionals “in a range of settings, at all levels”, and there is specific mention of “adult learners” within the model itself. The main visual representation of this national model is reproduced in figure 6.5, below.

![Figure 6.5 The National Model of Professional Learning (Education Scotland, 2022)](image-url)
In the centre of the model, there is an emphasis on the “dynamic relationship between learners ... and the educator’s professional learning”; the model emphasises that the educator’s PL “should be informed by the learner’s experience, voice and needs” (Education Scotland, no date) and that teaching practitioners should “place highest priority on being the best they can be for their students” (Education Scotland, 2021). However, the conclusions reached within this research question suggest that, in fulfilling this requirement to position the learners as their highest priority, lecturers are unable to engage with all aspects of this national model. As indicated within figure 6.6, we can picture an unbreachable barrier around the centre of this national model, as shown in red, which prevents lecturers from engaging in areas such as collaboration or enquiry as indicated in the national model. If we view the centre of this national model of PL as equating with the inward spiral outlined within figure 6.4, we can suggest that lecturers become ‘trapped’ within this restricting spiral, and are unable to engage with the other aspects of the national model, as shown within the adaptations made to the national model in figure 6.6.

Furthermore, Kirby et al. (2019, p. 265) describe the “sense of identity” created by a CoP, which affects “how members see themselves as connected to each other and understand the work they do”. Kirby et al. (2019, p. 272) draw on Mentis (2016) to discuss how “teachers’ identities are re-formed through inter-professional work as an act of ‘becoming and belonging’”. The PL in which lecturers will engage as part of this ‘becoming and belonging’ will differ depending on the CoP to which lecturers belong. If lecturers engage with a community made up of themselves and their learner groups, their PL will focus inward on that learner group and on the ‘classroom practice’ aspect of their role, and not link sufficiently to the “professional knowledge” (GTCS, 2020, p. 4) required by the GTCS. The idea that lecturers may engage with such a CoP is a significant factor to consider, which could impact negatively on the extent to which lecturers engage in PL.
6.3.4.2 Implications of this community on the assessment process

Within the action research meetings, there were occasional references to the ways in which participants felt forced to engage in assessment practices which were not entirely in line with the various policies and guidelines with which they are required to adhere. For example, as documented within section 5.1.1.2.2, lecturers discussed the focus of their learning and teaching activities - “you shouldn’t be teaching to an assessment but you kind of have to teach to an assessment”; lecturers outlined how they avoided discussion with learners of the formative nature of the assessment – “I don’t tell them that it’s only a formative, I just say, I need you to do this”; one lecturer explained how they felt forced to use software that had not been authorised by the institution (see section 5.1.1.6.1). These ideas led to the construction of categories *seeking change* and *isolated practice*. But the grounded theory categories also articulate the participants’ dedication and commitment to their learners – for example, the extent to which they take responsibility for the learning process and for their learners’ outcomes; the extent to which they sought to develop learning and teaching activities to meet their learners’ needs. There is a tension here between the professionalism displayed by the participants within the categories *perceptions of professionalism* and *seeking change* and the occasional points at which participants felt forced to work in ways which were not sanctioned by the policies and guidelines.

This grounded theory research suggests that the findings articulated within chapter five support an understanding of a community of practice including a lecturer and their individual learning groups. This idea supports an explanation of this tension. As explored within the initial phase literature review, assessment “lies at the centre of the student experience” and is a “dominant influence on student learning” (Price et al., 2012, p. 11). Other literature points to the assessment process as being a significant stressor for students, where assessment feedback is viewed as a personal “evaluation” by the student, or a “general affirmation or rejection of the self”. (Merry et al., 2013, p. xvi). That assessment practices are both important to learners and sources of difficulty is something of which lecturers will be aware, especially given the focused code ‘using a wide lens to view practice’ within the category *perceptions of professionalism*. If we suggest that lecturers form a community of practice with their student groups, we can therefore see the completion of a qualification as the ‘joint enterprise’ in which the community engages. In working towards this joint enterprise, a lecturer’s decision to extend or modify their assessment practices to meet the needs of their learner group becomes more understandable.

However, the impact of this is significant on a macro or societal level. Torrance (2018, p. 6) describes the “extensive debate...around the extent to which teachers can reliably assess their own students”. This debate surfaces within public awareness regularly in terms of discussion about coursework (e.g. Elkin, 2013; Crisp 2017) and in terms of “grade prediction” (Lee and Newton, 2021). The debate came to prominence during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, when exams were cancelled and grades were awarded based on teacher assessment. This discussion does not intend to discuss the validity of such a debate – but merely intends to note the presence of questions regarding the accuracy of teacher assessment and the perceptions of bias that surround the issue of teacher assessment – perceptions of bias which are seen even by those who could be said to profit from the situation, for example, within Bhopal and Myers (2022)’ assertion that “evidence of teacher bias ...was widely recognised by all students” (p. 153), including those in “independent, fee-paying schools” (p. 152).

It could therefore be argued that trust in teaching practitioners’ ability to assess their own students is not widely held, at least in the UK from where the literature cited above originates. This is problematic, because use of teacher assessment within assessment systems can be beneficial:
assessment systems which rely on externally-set exams alone can result in a “washback” effect... since practicing and coaching for tests can render the results invalid” (Torrance, 2018, p. 6). Torrance also draws on the literature to assert that “teachers can assess their students reliably...but that this involves considerable investment in professional development and moderation procedures” (2018, p. 6). The findings from this research outlined within section 6.3.4 provide a note of caution to those designing PL opportunities and procedures: too heavy a focus on the learners could result in assessment practices which are detrimental at a macro level.

6.3.5 ‘Social’ PL opportunities

Statement five: professional learning opportunities that are able to overcome this sense of isolation support lecturers to inhabit their professional landscape more deeply. This ‘social’ PL is characterised by engagement and dialogue, not with learners but with others within the community or landscape of practice.

6.3.5.1 The impact on identity

Wenger (1998)’s social theory of learning provides us with a theoretical understanding of why features of the AR meetings can make a positive contribution to PL practices. Research question one provided us with an understanding of lecturers’ perceptions of isolation from both their community and landscape of practice, and of the fine line that lecturers must straddle between fulfilling their own perceptions of professionalism and aligning with the community and landscape’s notions of competence and knowledgeability. As noted within the second-phase literature review (chapter four), the formation of a professional identity for lecturers within the FE context is complex: Tyler and Dymock (2021, p. 3) summarise the literature of “the past two decades” relating to lecturer professional identity as focusing “around the question of developing a distinct professional identity”. The findings relating to research question one provide some explanation of why the problem of identity formation persists within the Scottish FE context, despite the understanding of the problem within the literature.

The absence of a distinct professional identity for lecturers in Scotland has a significant impact on PL in the Scottish FE context: Farnsworth (2016, p. 155) explores how “if you do not identify with the community, you don’t care [that your practice does not align with perceptions of competence]. You try to find your identity elsewhere”. But, as already established within research question one, for lecturers within this FE context, that identity cannot come from the landscape of practice, meaning that lecturers have to search for a professional identity beyond the landscape of their educational context. For some lecturers, this results in an identity which is based on the formation of a CoP made up of the lecturer and their individual learner group, with all the resulting difficulties explored within section 6.3.4.

However, the focused codes within the categories support structures and perceptions of professionalism illustrate how the AR meetings provided lecturers with a space to articulate their perceptions of competence, as relevant to the lecturers and their individual practices. The initial codes from which the focused code ‘acknowledging action research meetings as support’ was constructed included multiple references to increased dialogue between lecturers. The initial codes included ‘sharing ideas’, ‘providing suggestions’, ‘providing clarification’, which were all viewed by the participants as having a positive impact on practice. The reference to the knowledge held by the group, which was discussed by participants in the last AR meeting (see section 5.1.1.4.1) indicates
that the participants had formed a community of practice, facilitated by the AR meetings; they were able to articulate and agree upon a definition of their ‘competence’ in their shared area of interest. The AR ethos of the meetings supported the participants to form a community of practice, which will have had an impact on the formation of their individual professional identities. It can be concluded that the AR methodology used within this research can make a positive contribution to professional learning practices within this context.

6.3.5.2 The impact on assessment practices

Within the literature, the importance of the social component in teachers’ assessment practices is also evident. Crisp (2013, p. 138) highlights the importance of “working with colleagues, drawing on their experiences and discussing coursework examples” for teachers within the secondary context when making judgements about assessment. In later work, Crisp (2017, p. 33) articulates an understanding of assessment as having an inner and outer frame (see figure 6.7), whereby the outer frame represents “how assessment is a social practice”, and the inner frame represents the assessment ‘event’ in which teaching practitioners engage.

![Figure 6.7 The inner and outer frame of assessment (Crisp, 2017, p. 33)](image-url)
Crisp’s work here focuses on teachers’ judgements when marking teacher-assessed projects, and does not encompass the wider understanding of assessment as articulated within chapter two, where assessment is embedded into the learning process (see section 2.4.1). However, given that formative assessment opportunities still also require teaching practitioners to make “detailed considerations of features of work” and engage in “analytic processes” (Crisp, 2017, p. 33), it could be argued that this articulation of assessment processes in which teachers engage is relevant to a wider understanding of all forms of assessment.

The findings from RQ 1 show that lecturers within the Scottish FE context may have difficulties accessing the “outer frame” (Crisp, 2017, p. 33) of assessment. Figure 6.7 articulates the importance of “subject-related teaching communities of practice with experiences that contribute to assessment” (Crisp, 2017, p. 33), but the categories serving multiple stakeholders and isolated practice explains why FE lecturers find it difficult to engage with that subject-related community of practice. The same categories explain why lecturers find it difficult to join an “extended, dissipated community of practice” for assessment work. Finally, the category feeling restricted explains the difficulties that lecturers have in engaging with other shareholders such as “exam board moderators”, and the lecturers’ references to difficulties understanding each other – as articulated within the glossary document (see Appendix H) - show how shared understanding cannot be gained from the documents and guidance referred to within figure 6.7. In short, this research has demonstrated that the outer frame which represents the “social context” around assessment is not easily available to lecturers within the Scottish FE context, and that this prevents them from engaging with the assessment processes and with PL that would support their assessment work.

The findings from this research are therefore particularly significant; the findings explain both why, despite their professionalism, lecturers may consider extending their assessment practices in order to benefit the community of practice that they have formed within their learners, and, also, how education systems which focus on strengthening the social connections between teaching practitioners can prevent practitioners from doing so. If lecturers are able to engage with their community or landscape of practice they are more likely to develop what Hargreaves (2021) calls “collaborative professionalism”, which will allow lecturers to gain the “thorough and deep knowledge” for which Price et al. (2012, p. 86) hope.

6.3.6 The action research ethos

Statement six: PL opportunities that can embed an action research ethos will serve to support lecturers to inhabit their professional landscape.

Stieglitz and Levitan (2020) define action research in one sentence: “The participation of those who know, in acting to learn and learning to act, in multiple cycles of activity, [which] can generate transformative outcomes for the people involved”. Within the Scottish educational context, engaging in the process of enquiry in this way is described as demonstrating “a sense of agency” (GTCS, no date-d, p. 3), and is seen as a key part of professionalism.

As seen within the focused codes ‘taking responsibility’ and ‘working as individuals’, participants demonstrated agentic action within their practice, but, as demonstrated within the category feeling restricted, believed their agency to be restricted. This tension may in part be due to Philpott and Oates (2017, p. 328)’s assertion that “as long as the goals and measure of success are set by others and teachers are held to account in relation to these, the scope for teacher agency will be limited”.

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We know from the focused code ‘serving multiple stakeholders’ that participants perceived themselves to be accountable to other stakeholders’ goals and success criteria. But, as explained within the methodology chapter, the action research meetings were designed as opportunities for lecturers to come together, regularly and repeatedly throughout one semester, with an overall aim of discussing assessment practices and engaging in cycles of action research activity. Within the context of these action research meetings, participants took action that aligned with the goals and success criteria of the other participants. The action research ethos of the meetings can therefore be seen as a contributing factor to the positive impact on PL practices.
Chapter seven: Concluding chapter

7.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter will provide a summary of the key findings in relation to the three research questions. It will outline the key contributions that this research makes to both knowledge and, as is appropriate for research done as part of a professional doctorate, to practice. It will review the strengths and the limitations of this study, will make recommendations, and will suggest important areas for future research that have been illuminated by this research.

The aim of this research was to explain and explore the factors which impact upon lecturers’ professional learning (PL) within the FE context, using assessment as a lens through which to view practice. This research aimed to answer three research questions:

- **Research question (RQ) one**: what factors have an impact on lecturers’ professional learning, in a further education (FE) learning context?
- **RQ two**: how do these factors impact on lecturers’ implementation and development of assessment practices, in a further education (FE) learning context?
- **RQ three**: to what extent can an action research methodology contribute to professional learning practices, in a further education (FE) learning context?

The underlying focus of all three research questions relates to PL for lecturers within the FE context. Within the literature, PL for teaching practitioners is viewed as ‘complex’; within the Scottish context, Kennedy et al. (2008, p. 402) describe it as “inevitably more complex than the simple introduction of a CPD framework and associated standards” due to the presence of “two different, and potentially conflicting, agendas”. One of these agendas focuses on accountability, the other focuses on “collegiality and collaboration” (p. 403).

Van Wijke et al. (2019, p. 887) describe complex social problems such as these as having “substantial interdependencies among multiple systems and actors”. They explore ideas at micro, meso and macro levels in order to show the interdependencies between these systems, where ‘micro’ is used to describe the ‘individual level’ (Boeren, 2019), for example the practices of individual lecturers. ‘Meso’, in the context of education, refers to the “department or institution where decisions are made about study programmes, course designs and assessment” (Dysthe and Engelsen, 2011, p. 66). The term ‘macro’ refers to “the political policy level” (Dysthe and Engelsen, 2011, p. 66) and is also used to describe “national and institutional traditions and characteristics that often are taken for granted” (Dysthe and Engelsen, 2011, p. 66).

The use of a micro, meso and macro framework has thus far been inappropriate for this research, given the importance of Wenger (1998) and Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015)’s concepts of communities and landscapes of practice as a theoretical foundation. This is because the terms micro, meso and macro do not correspond clearly to the concepts of communities or landscapes of practice. Depending on how the “joint enterprise” (Wenger, 1998, p. 77), is articulated, the community of practice varies: it may be made up of lecturers within one curriculum area (micro), one institution (meso) or include lecturers working within the larger FE context (macro). Similarly, a landscape of practice might be made up of different communities within an institution, e.g. senior management team; professional services staff; lecturers; students, etc., (meso), or made up of different communities beyond one institution, e.g. government departments; agencies; awarding bodies, etc. (macro). This has rendered use of the micro, meso, macro terminology too vague within the discussion and literature review. However, in this concluding chapter these terms will be used to...
allow an understanding of FE lecturer PL as a complex social problem which, Van Wijke et al. (2019) suggest, requires consideration at all three levels.

6.1 Research question one

This first research question considers the factors which have an impact on lecturers’ professional learning, in a further education (FE) learning context.

Wenger (1998) and Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015, p. 19) suggest that learning is the process of becoming someone “who inhabits the landscape” of their profession, and that this engagement can occur at two levels: the level of a community of practice, and the level of a landscape of practice. This research has demonstrated that there are specific factors preventing lecturers within the FE context from engaging with both of these levels. Firstly, lecturers within the FE context are not always able – or willing - to align their practice with their professional community of practice’s ideas of competence (Wenger, 1998). In terms of the PL that lecturers undertake, this research demonstrates that aligning with their professional community’s articulation of competence is not necessarily a priority for lecturers within the FE context.

In addition, this research demonstrates that there are also particular complexities for lecturers within the FE context in terms of the extent to which they can engage with the landscape of practice. The size of the FE landscape, coupled with lecturers’ perceptions of isolation and restriction, result in a metaphorical distance between communities within the landscape, which means that ‘knowledgeability’ (Wenger-Trayer et al., 2015) is either unattainable or, for some, undesirable. This, again, affects the PL in which lecturers engage.

This research also shows that lecturers form their professional identities primarily through contact with their learners. The findings from this research show that, due to the specific complexities of the FE sector, this can result in an increase in the factors which prevent lecturers from engaging with their professional community or landscape of practice. This can result in a restricting spiral of increasing isolation from the community and landscape of practice, and an increasing reliance on a professional identity formed through contact with learners.

Such a reliance has further consequences for the extent to which lecturers can engage with their professional community or landscape of practice. This research suggests that lecturers within the Scottish FE context may form a community of practice made up of themselves, as the lecturer, and their particular learner cohort or groups. There is evidence within these findings for the three elements of Wenger (1998)’s communities of practice: joint enterprise, mutual enterprise and shared repertoire. In forming such a community of practice, the extent to which lecturers form their professional identity through contact with their learners is enhanced – emphasising both the sense of isolation from the professional landscape and the sense of reliance on their learners in order to create identity.

The National Model of Professional Learning (Education Scotland, 2021) has implications for PL at micro, meso and macro levels. This research suggests that PL at meso and macro levels is not a priority for lecturers; lecturers are unlikely to be influenced by their community or landscape when selecting PL activities. Instead, the focus on their individual learners – at the very micro level – traps lecturers in the centre section of the national model, and prevents engagement with the other aspects. To return to Wenger’s social theory of learning, lecturers inhabit only one specific part of their professional landscape – they focus on the classroom practice element – and this restricts the type of PL in which they want to engage.
This contributes to knowledge regarding PL in two clear ways. As noted within chapter one, the FE context is not widely explored within the literature. The findings explored above confirm that the conclusions arrived at by Imants and van der Wal (2020, p. 8) regarding the “foundational education” context, which are summarised within section 6.3.4.1, are relevant specifically to the FE context. This in itself is a valuable contribution. Furthermore, Tyler and Dymock (2021, p. 3) suggest that lecturer PL has preoccupied the literature of “the past two decades”. This research suggests that if, at a macro or meso level, we continue to emphasise the importance of the relationship between lecturers and learners – that is to say, the micro elements of teaching – it will prevent lecturers from engaging with other aspects of the model. An important contribution to knowledge made within this research is that it is possible to over-emphasise the importance of the micro aspect of teaching; this research shows that policies, practices and communications at meso and macro levels need to highlight the importance of other aspects of practice.

7.2 Research question two
The second research question explores how the factors outlined in section 7.1 impact upon lecturers’ assessment practices.

RQ one demonstrated that there are barriers that prevent lecturers in the Scottish FE context from engaging with their professional community and/or landscape of practice. The discussion of RQ 2 (section 5.2.2) shows that this will have a detrimental impact on lecturers’ assessment practices, particularly those which require lecturers to use their professional judgement to evaluate the quality or validity of students’ work against given criteria. Given that assessment practices are “social practices” (Crisp, 2017, p. 33), this research suggests that the sense of distance from their professional community and/or landscape of practice felt by lecturers may result in lecturers having less interest in aligning, or less ability to align, with the ‘competence’ articulated by their professional CoP. This would mean that lecturers’ assessment judgements and practices may not align with those of other lecturers, and would therefore have implications for processes such as standardisation. Furthermore, a sense of distance or isolation from the landscape of practice may result in less interest or ability in gaining ‘knowledgeability’ of the wider landscape – meaning that lecturers may not be able to align their practices with the requirements of awarding bodies, institutional requirements or macro policy directions.

RQ one also demonstrated that lecturers form their professional identity primarily through contact with their learners, which can result in lecturers being caught in a spiral as they move away from the professional community or landscape of practice, and towards increased engagement with their learners. Given the emphasis on assessment as a social practice, as discussed above, this finding demonstrates how the barriers preventing lecturers from engaging with the professional community and/or landscape of practice cannot be assumed to improve without intervention (arguably in terms of appropriate PL). Lecturers who get caught up in this spiral may become increasingly distanced from their professional community and/or landscape. The detrimental impact on assessment articulated above will require intervention to prevent the increasingly restrictive spiral taking lecturers away from their community of practice with other lecturers, and/or the wider landscape of practice.

Finally, RQ one demonstrated that lecturers may form a CoP made up of themselves and their learner groups. This also has implications for lecturers’ assessment practices – the formation of such a CoP explains why lecturers may feel, on occasion, the need to extend their assessment practices in ways that are not sanctioned by institutional policies or guidelines. Such “agentive action” (Sherman and Teemant (2021a, p. 1471) in favour of the CoP made up of lecturers and their learner groups will
result in lecturers engaging in assessment practices which do not align with “practice and levels of achievement elsewhere” (Torrance, 2018, p. 6). These “threats to reliability” (Torrance, 2018, p. 6) have implications at the meso level: assessment practices which do not align with practices elsewhere may have negative implications for an institution’s reputation. They also have implications at a macro level: public trust in reliable teacher assessment allows for assessment systems which test a wider range of skills and competences than those that can be reliably tested by externally set examination alone (Torrance, 2018, p. 6). Systems which result in CoPs between lecturers and their learners do not allow for this trust: the consequences of this have implications at macro level in terms of the types of assessment system that public trust allows education systems to adopt.

7.3 Research question three

The third research question asks to what extent the action research methodology used within this research can contribute to professional learning practices.

The action research meetings were viewed by participants as positive PL opportunities. This was primarily due to the following features:

- Dialogue, through which participants are able to engage with different perspectives, due to the involvement of lecturers from multiple curriculum areas.
- A focus on discussion and interaction, which allowed the PL opportunity to move away from the “implied or explicit binary dualism” (Sherman and Teemant, 2021b, p. 372), which participants within this study wished to avoid.
- The iterative, regular structure of the meetings, which gave time for participants to reflect on the discussions which took place and consider them within the context of their professional practice.

The features noted thus far (dialogue; discussion; structure) could be incorporated into many different types of PL opportunities; the participants’ positive perceptions of these features are an important contribution to knowledge made by this research, which could be used in many different situations. But a further conclusion for this RQ related to the ethos of the meetings. The meetings were designed with an action research ethos – they were opportunities for the participants to come together with an overall aim of engaging in cycles of action research activity. This focus, with its emphasis on practical action to have an impact on practice, allowed lecturers space to articulate their perceptions of competence – which allowed them opportunity to become a CoP with a shared understanding of competence. Lecturers were sufficiently confident in their CoP and sufficiently engaged with it to produce a joint response to the national consultation regarding assessment and the awarding body, therefore clearly breaking free from the restricting spiral focusing only on their individual learner groups.

Within the conclusion to RQ one, it was noted that there are particular complexities for lecturers within the FE context in engaging with their professional community and/or landscape of practice, and that this prevents lecturers from engaging in areas such as collaboration or enquiry, as indicated in the National Model of Professional Learning (Education Scotland, 2022). It was also noted that this may result in lecturers forming CoPs made up of themselves and their individual learner cohorts or groups. RQ two noted the impact of these ideas on lecturers’ assessment practices, and discussed the detrimental implications of these both at a meso and a macro level. The finding articulated here is therefore of particular significance: it shows that the AR methodology can contribute to PL practices in important ways. Incorporating AR methodology into PL opportunities can support
lecturers to form their professional CoP with other lecturers, which would have a positive impact on the assessment practices of lecturers within the Scottish FE context.

7.4 Recommendations
Based on the conclusions articulated within chapter seven, the following recommendations for practice are made:

1. **Opportunities for lecturers to engage with their communities and landscapes of practice need to be emphasised, to allow “collaborative professionalism” (Hargraves, 2021) to be developed within the lecturing profession.**

   There is, according to Hargreaves (2021), already an “appetite” for such “collaborative professionalism” within the teaching profession globally. The findings from this research show that lecturers within the Scottish FE context feel isolated from both their community and wider landscape of practice; opportunities for engagement and interaction between lecturers and their wider landscape of practice should be available to lecturers to overcome this sense of isolation.

   Hargreaves (2021) calls for “in-person and (or) virtual professional networks” to be initiated or enhanced in order to facilitate this engagement. The findings from this research suggest that virtual opportunities for engagement and collaboration are sufficient to support lecturers, providing that the opportunities are structured to contain the features explored within section 5.3.

   This recommendation is particularly relevant given the proposed changes to the senior phase of Scottish education (Scottish Government, 2023, p. 92), which includes recommendations for the increased use of teacher judgements and an increased emphasis on teacher professionalism within “local and national standards for qualifications and assessment”.

   This recommendation is also of relevance to the Scottish educational context in terms of the current changes being made to the awarding body structures. The findings from this research show that lecturers currently feel an absence of trust with the SQA (see section 5.1.1.2.2); an emphasis on engagement with the wider landscape – particularly with this awarding body – will help to mitigate this feeling of a lack of trust. This recommendation could inform the changes to the awarding body when they happen.

2. **Care should be taken to avoid over-emphasising the importance of lecturer-student relationships at the expense of lecturers’ professional relationships with their community and landscape of practice.**

   Instead, an emphasis on collaboration and engagement between lecturers and within their wider landscape of practice should be emphasised within macro and meso policies. Such an emphasis will have positive implications for the ways in which lecturers’ professional identities are formed, which will in turn have positive implications for their assessment practices, as discussed within section 6.3.

3. **Professional learning opportunities using action research (AR) principles should be supported and facilitated within institutions.**

   Professional learning opportunities that are focused through AR structures can support lecturers within the FE context to shift their attention away from the micro context of their practice, and towards the community and landscape of practice. As explained within recommendation 2, above, this will result in positive implications for lecturers’ professional identities and assessment practices.
4. Care should be taken when communicating ideas of ‘best practice’, so as to avoid such ideas becoming – or being perceived to be – prescriptive requirements.

Instead, communication regarding ‘best practice’ should be nuanced, and care should be taken to emphasise the context of these ‘best practice’ ideas.

7.5 Limitations

Flick (2018b, p. 10) asserts that “it is unethical to do qualitative research that has not reflected about how to ensure the quality of the research”. Ethical considerations have permeated the research process and are discussed repeatedly throughout this thesis – and given Flick’s recommendation that “qualitative researchers... are interested to know whether (their) results are ‘valid’ and whether they can ‘rely’ on them” (2018b, p. 10), this has required reflections of the limitations of this research, in order to ensure validity and reliability.

Action research methodologies are often characterised as processes which benefit only the small number of participants who take part in the research, as explored within section 3.2.2.1. The particularities of the research institution, and the small number of research participants involved in the research, require acknowledgement; as stated within section 3.2.2.1, the knowledge gained from an investigation of the practices of a few practitioners from one context could certainly be considered a partial view of the FE context. Steps have been taken to ensure that this knowledge gained from this research is as relevant and generalisable as possible – for example, the decision to combine the action research methodology with a constructivist grounded theory methodology. Reason and Bradbury (2011, p. 6)’s consideration of first-, second- and third-person action research was also incorporated into the research – for example, in terms of the efforts made to report the outcomes of the action research process as widely as possible within the institution (i.e. ensuring the third-person category was fulfilled).

Nevertheless, one limitation of this research is the extent to which the results are generalisable. As is appropriate for research based on both CGT and AR methodologies, the conclusions to which this research has come should be recognised as theories, generated from one specific context. Future research designed to test these theories more widely would be a logical next step.

A further limitation of this research is that all the participants come from the same professional community of practice (i.e lecturers), and that other voices from the wider landscape have not been incorporated into the research process. Given the importance of Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015)’s concept of the landscape of practice, and given the acknowledgement that assessment is a concept which occurs on the boundaries between communities within the landscape, future research should focus on the inclusion of other voices from the wider landscape. For example, it would be appropriate to include voices from the awarding bodies, from institutional senior management teams, from students. The absence of these, and other, voices within this research process means that the conclusions can only be formed as to the lecturers’ perceptions of issues – this research is limited in terms of the number of voices it can represent.

Another limitation worthy of consideration relates specifically to the second research question. Action research, according to Dick (2007, p. 3) has “a commitment to both theory development and actual change”. Constructivist grounded theory, according to Charmez (2017a, p. 34), has an underlying “pragmatist goal of social reform”. Within research question two my original intention was to improve or develop assessment practices within the institution at which this research took place. I have no concrete evidence that such improvement or development took place – which I take to be a limitation, certainly in terms of my expectations for this research.
Lastly, this written thesis might be viewed as having a limitation in terms of the absence of a chapter dedicated to ethical considerations. Although some ethical considerations were mentioned explicitly within chapter three, the absence of a specific chapter dedicated to ethical considerations might be taken to mean that ethical considerations were not of sufficient importance to the research process. In fact, I believe its absence to suggest the opposite: ethical thinking was embedded in each stage of the research, and I have tried to highlight its presence throughout the chapters. Flick (2018, p. 10) states that “ethical reflection becomes a necessary step in the research process”; I believe that the absence of a specific chapter about ethics shows the extent to which ethics have been embedded throughout the process.

7.7 Areas for future research
A significant area for future research is the suggestion that lecturers may find themselves in Communities of Practice (CoPs) made up of themselves and their learner groups. Further research would be required to ascertain whether all the required features (see Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015 for details) are consistently present within such a grouping.

A further area for future research is the impact of action research meetings made up of those from the wider landscape of practice. As noted in section 7.5, all of the participants within this research came from the same professional CoP; future research should focus on the inclusion of other voices from the wider landscape.

This research recommends that professional learning opportunities should be structured using action research principles. However, it is worth noting here that there has been little consideration of the role played by the researcher in supporting and facilitating the action research meetings attended by the participants in this research. Further research regarding the impact of the researcher’s role within professional learning opportunities which are structured around action research principle should be conducted.

Lastly, as noted in section 7.5, the conclusions to which this research has come should be recognised as theories, generated from one specific context. Future research designed to test these theories more widely would be a logical next step. It would be appropriate for research to test these theories both within Scotland, given the importance of the National Model of Professional Learning within the discussion of the RQs, and more widely. Given the recommendations within the Scottish Government’s review of qualifications and assessment (Scottish Government, 2023), which places an emphasis on teacher professionalism and professional judgement, it would be particularly appropriate to test the findings relating to RQ3 in terms of how to support professional learning within the Scottish educational context.

References


GTCS (2023) *Provisional professional standard for college lecturers approved; new transitional route to GTC Scotland registration opens.* Available at [Provisional professional standard for college lecturers approved; new transitional route to GTC Scotland registration opens - The General Teaching Council for Scotland](https://www.gtcs.org.uk) (Accessed 5 May 2023).


GTCS (no date-a) *Registration.* Available at: [https://www.gtcs.org.uk/registration](https://www.gtcs.org.uk/registration) (Accessed 16 November 2022).


GTCS (no date-c) *About Us.* Available at [https://www.gtcs.org.uk/about-us/#:~:text=Our%20mission%20is%20to%20maintain,individual%2C%20group%20and%20system%20level](https://www.gtcs.org.uk/about-us/#:~:text=Our%20mission%20is%20to%20maintain,individual%2C%20group%20and%20system%20level) (Accessed 27 February 2023).


GTCS (no date-e) *Qualified in Scotland (college lecturer).* Available at: [Qualified in Scotland (college lecturer) (gtcs.org.uk)](https://www.gtcs.org.uk/)(Accessed 01 April 2024).


Johnson, L. (2017). ‘Theoretical and conceptual background’. In Community-based qualitative research (pp. 2-19). SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 9781071802809


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Appendix A

Please access the researcher’s timeline interview recording, as provided to the participants, at this link:

https://burnsideconsulting-
my.sharepoint.com/:v:/g/personal/susie_worldwidewilson_co_uk/EZAjektcwhOvN_5O-
Ihu2YBL6TGdjejiA002G3mbe_ziA?e=5CKh
## Appendix B: proposed meeting schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting number</th>
<th>Length of meeting</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Meeting focus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>August 2021</td>
<td>Action research (AR) spiral stage 1: planning a change. Initial articulation of the ‘problem’ – inviting participants to discuss their experiences of the assessment and feedback process at Argyll College UHI. Discussion of the policies and practices in place and the impact on teaching practice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>60-90 minutes</td>
<td>September 2021</td>
<td>Continuation of AR spiral stage 1: planning a change. Reflection on discussions from meeting 1. Development of ideas articulated in meeting 1. Initial articulation of specific focus for change. Articulation of each practitioner’s intentions for ‘change’ (either together or individually).</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>60-90 minutes</td>
<td>October 2021</td>
<td>Action research spiral stage 3: reflecting. Collaborative reflection on changes made and consequences. Reviewing of situational analysis mapping, if appropriate. AR spiral stage 4: replanning. Articulation of each practitioner’s intentions for ‘change’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>60-90 minutes</td>
<td>November 2021</td>
<td>Action research spiral stage 3: reflecting. Collaborative reflection on changes made and consequences. Reviewing of situational analysis mapping, if appropriate. AR spiral stage 4: replanning. Articulation of each practitioner’s intentions for ‘change’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>60-90 minutes</td>
<td>December 2021</td>
<td>Action research spiral stage 3: reflecting. Collaborative reflection on changes made and consequences. Reviewing of situational analysis mapping, if appropriate. AR spiral stage 4: replanning. Articulation of each practitioner’s intentions for ‘change’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>60-90 minutes</td>
<td>January 2022</td>
<td>Action research spiral stage 3: reflecting. Collaborative reflection on changes made and consequences. Reviewing of situational analysis mapping, if appropriate. Discussion of participants’ intentions for their own practice, as appropriate.</td>
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Correspondences between UK and Irish frameworks with European qualifications frameworks

Within Europe, two overarching qualifications frameworks exist to which the national qualifications frameworks of the UK and Ireland relate: The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA) also known as the Bologna Framework.

Table 1 shows the correspondence of levels established between national qualifications frameworks and the EQF.

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Table 2 shows the outcome of verifying the compatibility of higher education frameworks for Scotland (FQHEIS/SCQF), for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and for the NFQ for Ireland (NFQ IE) with the FQ-EHEA as follows:

Scope of Apprenticeships across the UK and Ireland

Qualifications can Cross Boundaries

A guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland

How to use this leaflet:
- This leaflet provides information that allows you to look at the ways qualifications are organised in the UK and Ireland.
- It shows which qualifications in other countries are broadly comparable in terms of the level of challenge to your qualifications (or those that you are interested in taking).
- On the left side of the principal table you will find the main stages of education or employment - you can find where you are in these stages.
- To the right of this you can see the nearest levels and similar kinds of qualifications that are used in the other countries.
- This makes it possible to draw broad comparisons in terms of the level of challenge, rather than direct equivalences, between qualifications and their levels for each country.
- The back page indicates how UK and Irish qualifications frameworks relate to qualifications frameworks in Europe.
- This leaflet is updated periodically. Check one of the websites for the most up-to-date version.

QAA
QAA House
Southquilte Street
Glasgow G3 4NB
Tel: 0845 276 5700
www.qaa.ac.uk

CQC
CQC Partnership
201 West George Street
Glasgow G2 4WJ
Email: info@cqc.org.uk
www.cqc.org.uk

CCEA Regulation
21 Clarendon Road, Clarendon
Dock, Belfast BT1 3BG
Tel: +44 (0)28 9026 1200
Email: info@ccea.org.uk
www.ccea.org.uk

SCQF Partnership
www.scqf.org.uk

London, Westminster, London WC2P 2AB
Tel: 020 7066 8100
Email: info@ofqual.gov.uk
www.ofqual.gov.uk

QQI
QQI, South Gate House
South Gate Street
South Dublin City 9
Tel: +353 (0)1 905 8100
Email: info@qqi.ie
www.qqi.ie

Coventry, CV1 3BH
Tel: 024 7655 3600
Email: info@coventry.ac.uk
www.coventry.ac.uk

Wales
Northern Ireland
England
Scotland

Typical higher education qualifications within each level

FHEQ level | EQF level | SCQF level | NFQ IE level | Corresponding FQ-EHEA cycle
---|---|---|---|---
Doctoral degrees | 8 | 12 | 10 | Third cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
Master's degrees (including Integrated Master's) | 7 | 11 | 9 | Second cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
Postgraduate diplomas | 6 | 10 | 8 | First cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
Postgraduate certificates | 5 | 9 | 7 | Intermediate qualifications within the first cycle
Bachelor's degrees with honours (Honours Bachelor Degrees) | 4 | 6 | 5 | Short cycle qualifications
Irish Higher Diplomas | 4 | 5 | 5 | Intermediate qualifications within the short cycle
Bachelor's degrees/ Ordinary Bachelor Degree | 3 | 4 | 4 | Short cycle qualifications
Graduate diplomas | 2 | 3 | 3 | Graduated Apprenticeship
Graduate certificates | 1 | 2 | 2 | Foundation Degree/ Higher National Qualifications (HNC) and Higher National Diplomas (HND)
Foundation Degrees (for example FdA, FdSc) | 6 | 8 | 5 | Short cycle qualifications
Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE) | 5 | 8 | 4 | Intermediate qualifications within the short cycle
Higher National Diplomas (HND) | 4 | 7 | 3 | Short cycle qualifications
Irish Higher Certificates | 3 | 6 | 2 | Intermediate qualifications within the short cycle
Higher National Certificates (HNC) | 2 | 5 | 1 | Short cycle qualifications
Certificates of Higher Education (CEHE) | 1 | 4 | 0 | Short cycle qualifications

For more information or comparability with these frameworks see: https://ec.europa.eu/eqf/home_en.htm and www.enic-naric.net.

Qualifications can Cross Boundaries

A guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland

How to use this leaflet:
- This leaflet provides information that allows you to look at the ways qualifications are organised in the UK and Ireland.
- It shows which qualifications in other countries are broadly comparable in terms of the level of challenge to your qualifications (or those that you are interested in taking).
- On the left side of the principal table you will find the main stages of education or employment - you can find where you are in these stages.
- To the right of this you can see the nearest levels and similar kinds of qualifications that are used in the other countries.
- This makes it possible to draw broad comparisons in terms of the level of challenge, rather than direct equivalences, between qualifications and their levels for each country.
- The back page indicates how UK and Irish qualifications frameworks relate to qualifications frameworks in Europe.
- This leaflet is updated periodically. Check one of the websites for the most up-to-date version.
### Main stages of education/employment

Qualifications can be taken at any age in order to continue or return to education or training.

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<td><strong>Professional or postgraduate education, research or employment</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Entry to professional graduate employment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Specialised education and training</strong></td>
<td><strong>Qualifications can cross boundaries - a guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland. Seventh edition published September 2019</strong></td>
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<td>Master's Degree, Vocational, Technical and Professional Qualifications</td>
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<td>Master’s Degree, Integrated Master’s Degree, Postgraduate Diploma, Postgraduate Certificate, Professional Apprenticeship, Graduate Apprenticeship, PDA, SVQ, Award</td>
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<td>Bachelor’s Degree with Honours, Bachelor’s Degree, Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate</td>
<td>Vocational, Technical and Professional Qualifications</td>
<td>Vocation, Technical and Professional Qualifications</td>
<td>Honours Degree, Vocational Qualifications, Professional Certificate in Education</td>
<td>Honours Bachelor Degree, Higher Diploma</td>
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*The Access to HE Diploma is regulated by QAA but is not part of the FHEQ.*

The table gives an indication of how you can compare qualifications across national boundaries. Examples of major qualifications at each level are provided. For more detail of the qualifications that are current and legacy at the time of publication in each country, you will need to consult the website given at the head of each column.

This leaflet is designed to give some information to help you begin this process; for example, by telling you what your qualification, or qualifications you are interested in studying, are broadly comparable to in other countries.
RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPANT
INFORMATION SHEET

How does institutional assessment literacy affect teachers’ assessment practices, in an F.E networked learning context?

You have been invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of this research study?
This study aims to explore teachers’ assessment and feedback practices at FE level, with a view to furthering our understanding of assessment literacy. There has been much research into assessment and feedback within Higher Education (HE), but not much at FE level: this study aims to fill this gap within the literature. For more information, please see https://stream.uhi.ac.uk/Player/dhEH7G2b

Why have I been invited to take part in this study?
You have been approached because you deliver SQA units at level 6 or below at Argyll College UHI, and because you have demonstrated an interest in assessment and feedback practices.

What will be involved if I agree to take part?
There are two stages to the research.

Stage 1: You will take part in an interview designed to explore your journey to becoming a teaching practitioner. This will be a one-to-one interview with Susannah Wilson, in which you will plot the different stages of your career on a timeline, considering the significant events which have contributed to your identity as a teacher.

Stage 2: A series of meetings with the other participants, in which you discuss and explore the ways in which you include assessment and feedback in your teaching practice. As well as exploring your current practice, the meetings will consider any problems with the assessment and feedback processes and the ways in which you might be able to improve the process. The meetings will take place once a month during semester one of academic year 2021-22. Their length will depend on the number of participants, but are anticipated to be no more than 90 minutes per meeting.

As part of the recruitment process for this project, you will be asked to suggest the names of anyone working within Argyll College UHI who may also be interested in joining this research project. You will be under no obligation to suggest anyone, and there will be no requirement for anyone you name to join the project.

Do I have to take part?
No, you do not have to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form.
What are the benefits of taking part?

You will help to develop our understanding of the realities of the assessment and feedback process at FE level, from a teaching perspective. You will help to develop our understanding of the ways in which Argyll College UHI can support assessment and feedback.

We hope that you will also gain further insight into your own teaching practices, and benefit from exploring practice with other tutors. This will be useful for you if you decide to register with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS).

What are the risks of taking part?

There are no risks to you if you decide to take part. The only cost will be in terms of time – you will attend monthly meetings of no more than 90 minutes in length.

How will the data I provide be used?

We hope to publish the findings and analysis of this research. However, you will not be directly identifiable in any dissemination or publication of the results. Any quotations from you will be paraphrased and anonymised. Data collected about you will not be stored with your personal details, so you will not be identified.

Stage 1 of the project is a one-to-one interview with the lead researcher, in which you will explore significant events in your career as a teacher in order to reflect on your identity as a teacher. You will be invited to choose a pseudonym for this stage of the research. This stage of the research is designed to provide insight into the ways in which our teaching identities impact upon our practice; you will be invited to read and comment on the way in which your interview is written about, and the researcher will require your approval before publishing or disseminating anything which relates to your stage 1 interview.

The lead researcher for this project, Susannah Wilson, has previously conducted research within Argyll College UHI which has been disseminated within the institution. You may wish to access recordings of this dissemination, for example at this link, to see how she anonymises the participants’ contributions within her discussion of the project.

Who will have access to the data and where will it be held?

The data will be kept within Open University technologies by the lead researcher. It will be in a secure area, and will be password protected. It will only be accessible to the lead researcher and her supervisors, and the regulatory authorities.

What if I change my mind?

You can withdraw from this study at any point. If you choose to withdraw before the first group meeting, expected to be held in August 2021, all data gathered relating to you will be deleted.

The data analysis methods used within this study are conducted as data is collected – this means that, should you choose to withdraw after August 2021, your contributions up to that point will form part of the analysis. Your right to erasure, therefore, can only be extended until August 2021. However, as noted above, you will not be directly identifiable in any publication or dissemination of the research findings.

What will happen with the results of this study?
This project forms part of a doctoral study: results will be published as part of the doctoral thesis. It is hoped that this project will be shared with the professional community and the public, to further our understandings of assessment and feedback in an FE context.

You will be invited to read and comment on the write-up of this project prior to its dissemination and publication.

**Has this study been approved?**

This work has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion, from the OU Human Research Ethics Committee - HREC reference number: HREC/3957/ Wilson

**What if there is a problem?**

For further information about this study, or to raise any queries or concerns, please contact Susannah Wilson.

Alternatively, you may wish to speak with Dr Maria Fernandez-Toro, who is supervising this research project. You can contact Maria Fernandez-Toro using her email address - Maria.Fernandez-Toro@open.ac.uk.

**How do I agree to take part?**

To opt-in to this study, please email Susannah Wilson. You will be sent a consent form – please sign it and return by email to Susannah Wilson.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.
### Data Collection

**What data will you collect or create?**

**Prior to stage 1:**
- Participant consent forms (between five and eight) including personal data (name/email address of each participant) and an identifying four digit number, randomly generated. Saved as .pdf files on CD-R storage device. Two copies will be made: one stored in locked storage in the office of the lead researcher. Back-up CD-R will be held in locked storage at the lead researcher’s home.

- One ‘pseudonym’ file – saved as .docx document. This file will list the randomly generated identifying number discussed above. For each identifying number, an identifying acronym will also be assigned (one which does not relate to the participant initials). Participants will also be invited to choose a pseudonym and, if they choose one, this will be listed within this file. The file will be saved within the lead researcher’s Open University OneDrive account. No identifying details will be stored within this file.

In order to identify participants, these two pieces of data will be required. As such, they will not be stored together, and the data with identifying details (name/email address) will be kept in locked storage conditions. This will ensure that identifying details of the participants will not be made public.

**Stage 1: timeline interviews.**

**Data collected:**
- Pictorial image of timeline – saved as .pdf document. One per participant.
- Audiovisual recording of each interview conducted through Webex software. Saved as MP4 file.
- Transcript produced by Webex software – initially saved as .vtt file, then deleted once a copy has been made (see below).
- Second copy of transcript made as a .docx file, which will be anonymised at the point of saving (and transcription mistakes will be corrected). At this point the .vtt file will be deleted.
- Lead researcher’s memo – initially handwritten, typed up and saved as .docx document. At least one per participant.

**Stage 2: AR meetings**

**Data collected:**
- Minutes and agendas. One per meeting, circulated by email to all participants pre and post meeting. Saved as .docx file.
- Electronic documents which serve to generate dialogue and discussion, e.g. mind maps, generated through whiteboard function on Webex. Images will be saved as .png
- Audiovisual recordings of each meeting. Saved as MP4 file.
- Transcript produced by Webex software – initially saved as .vtt file, then deleted once a copy has been made (see below).
- Second copy of .docx file, which will be anonymised at the point of saving (and transcription mistakes will be corrected). At this point the .vtt file will be deleted.
- Lead researcher’s memos – initially handwritten, typed up and saved as .docx document. After each meeting.
How will the data be collected or created?

My research is based on an action research methodology, using grounded theory and situational analysis as data analysis methods. Both grounded theory and situational analysis are based on the construction of codes and categories which are found within the research documentation. In terms of quality assurance, both grounded theory and situational analysis are supported by an emphasis on researcher reflexivity which is articulated through the memos produced by the researcher throughout the project. Analysis will be based on the key documents which are noted below. For quality assurance purposes, these documents and the memos will be explored by the lead researcher and her supervisors, allowing the lead researcher to justify or explain the developments in the analysis, and allowing the supervisors to provide guidance and to highlight any inconsistencies.

All documents will be saved and structured within three main folders - 'prior to stage 1', 'Stage 1 timeline', 'stage 2 AR'.

Prior to stage 1: this folder will contain one document with the list of identifying numbers and the identifying acronym for each candidate. No personal details will be stored within this document. This document will be named ‘Participants.docx’. The identifying number will correspond with those written on the consent forms, which will be saved and stored on a separate device for data security reasons.

Stage 1: This folder will contain one subfolder per participant, following naming convention Assigned acronym_YYYYMMDD (i.e. FW_20210823).

Each subfolder will contain
i) a pictorial image of the timeline (naming convention Assignedacronym_Timeline);
ii) audio recording of the interview (naming convention Assignedacronym_audio)
iii) the two transcriptions of the interviews (naming convention Assignedacronym_transcript.vtt and Assignedacronym_transcript.docx)

The .vtt transcript will be deleted once the .docx transcript has been produced by the lead researcher.

Stage 2: One subfolder per meeting, following naming convention Meet_Number_YYYYMMDD (i.e. Meet_1_20210801).

Each subfolder will contain
i) an audio recording of the meeting (naming convention Meet_Number_audio);
ii) transcript of the interview (naming convention Meet_Number_transcript)
iii) any additional documents such as mindmaps (naming convention Meet_Number_TYPEOFDOC).

Memos will be initially handwritten, then saved on a .docx document. Using the header functionality of Microsoft word, an index will also be produced within the document, detailing the date the memo was written and a descriptive title.

Documentation and Metadata

What documentation and metadata will accompany the data?

Questions to consider:
- What information is needed for the data to be to be read and interpreted in the future?
- How will you capture / create this documentation and metadata?
- What metadata standards will you use and why?

A Microsoft word document will accompany the research data, detailing the name, the date and a brief description of each file saved.
Furthermore, using the header functionality of Microsoft Word, an index will also be produced within the memo, document detailing the date the memo was written and a descriptive title.

Following the dating system suggested within the Open University’s professional doctorate resources (Open University, 2020), all documents will be dated following YYYYMMDD convention.


**Ethics and Legal Compliance**

**How will you manage any ethical issues?**

Questions to consider:

- Have you gained consent for data preservation and sharing?
- How will you protect the identity of participants if required? e.g. via anonymisation
- How will sensitive data be handled to ensure it is stored and transferred securely?

Participants will be asked to sign a consent form, which will be phrased in terms of granular consent options. Participants will be asked to opt in/opt out of giving permission to use, achieve and share the data with yes/no tick box options for each. Participant consent forms will ensure that participants are aware of the consequences of participating in this research, and will explain what data will be saved and who will have access to it. It will also explain how the data will be preserved and shared. This will also be discussed with each participant prior to stage 1 of the research.

Participants will be assigned an identifying number (randomly generated) which will be noted on their consent form, and an assigned acronym which will be noted on the participant document collected before stage 1. This document will be named ‘Participants.docx’; no personal details will be stored within this document.

Participants will not know the assigned acronyms of other participants. Personal details which are mentioned by participants within the meetings (e.g. each other’s names in a discussion situation), and which therefore will be detailed within the audio recording of interviews/meetings and on the initial transcript, will be removed and anonymised on the second copy of the transcript made by the lead researcher. Only the lead researcher will have access to the initial transcript and audio recording.

The participatory action research methodology of this research requires that participants have access to research documents, but for ethical reasons this will not extend to these two initial files (the audio recording and initial transcription).

**How will you manage copyright and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) issues?**

Questions to consider:

- Who owns the data?
- How will the data be licensed for reuse?
- Are there any restrictions on the reuse of third-party data?
- Will data sharing be postponed / restricted e.g. to publish or seek patents?

It is possible that secondary data might be used within this research, given that the methodology requires “theoretical sampling” (Clarke et al., 2018, p. 113). Should such data be incorporated into the research, the lead researcher will contact the owner of the data and ensure that appropriate copyright and IPR processes are followed. However, given the action research methodology, it is yet unknown in what direction the research will take and what secondary data might be incorporated. As such, this DMP will be updated as the research progresses.
Storage and Backup

How will the data be stored and backed up during the research?
All data will be stored within my OneDrive storage area linked to my Open University Office 365 account. Files will be backed up onto a CD-R storage device each month, and stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office.

The exception to this will be the consent forms, which, given the amount of identifying information contained with them, will be stored only on CD-R storage devices (separate to the back-up). Two copies will be made: one stored in locked storage in the office of the lead researcher. Back-up CD-R will be held in locked storage at the lead researcher’s home.

It will be my responsibility to make the back-up files each month.

How will you manage access and security?
The CPAR methodology requires participants to view and challenge the lead reporter’s written accounts of the situation. Within stage 1 of the research, participants will have access to the data relating to their interviews (excluding the audio). Within stage 2, participants will have access to summary data resulting from the action research meetings (e.g. minutes of the meetings) but these minutes will not include reference to individual participants’ contributions. Phrases such as ‘the participants discussed’ and ‘it was agreed that…’ will be used, in order to ensure that participants cannot be identified from these minutes. Furthermore, participants will be reminded of the need to keep the data relating to stage 2 accessible only to other participants, although the risk to data security is low, given that participants will not be identifiable from the data.

Selection and Preservation

Which data should be retained, shared, and/or preserved?
Questions to consider:
- What data must be retained/destroyed for contractual, legal, or regulatory purposes?
- How will you decide what other data to keep?
- What are the foreseeable research uses for the data?
- How long will the data be retained and preserved?

The Open University require data to be preserved for a minimum of ten years after the completion of the research. However, there is no requirement to share the data if, as is the case for the timeline interview transcripts and the pictorial images of the timeline, they contain potentially identifying information. As such, these documents will be kept under permanent embargo, although a metadata-only record will be kept and shared within ORDO.

Furthermore, upon completion of my thesis, audio recordings of the interviews will be destroyed for ethical reasons. As stated elsewhere within this plan, the recording software will produce an initial transcript of the meetings, which will be destroyed as soon as the second transcription has been made by the lead researcher. This second transcription will not retain any identifying details of participants. In this way, only data that has had identifying details removed will be retained.

Further foreseeable research uses are limited due to the participatory methodology and the fact that all participants would be required to have active involvement in subsequent research. I will put restricted access on the data, so that researchers have to contact me to request permission to access the data. In this way, I will be able to control how the data is used/re-used – I would allow access to the data to read/interpret/verify, and would discuss the potential for re-use of the data on a case by case basis.
What is the long-term preservation plan for the dataset?

Questions to consider:
- Where e.g. in which repository or archive will the data be held?
- What costs if any will your selected data repository or archive charge?
- Have you costed in time and effort to prepare the data for sharing / preservation?

The data will be held in Open Research Data Online ORDO – the Open University research repository.

Data Sharing

How will you share the data?

Sharing with participants
Research which is based on a participatory methodology, such as this, requires data to be shared with participants (Kemmis et al, 2014).

For stage 1 of the research (the timeline interviews), participants will have access to the transcripts of their timeline interview and to the pictorial image of the timeline. This data will be shared with participants through the functionality of Microsoft Office: the data will be saved to the lead researcher’s OU OneDrive account, and participants will be provided with a link to these two data files relating to their interviews. The link will not allow participants to edit the documents.

For stage 2 of the research (Action Research spirals), participants will be provided with access to the minutes of the meetings and the electronic documents used to facilitate discussion. These will be shared using the Office functionality described above. These documents will be shared with the participants due to the participatory methodology of this research, which requires participants to view and challenge the ways in which the lead researcher records the research.

Participants will all have access to Microsoft Office – a subscription is provided as part of their employment.

Sharing with research team
As stated above, all research documents will be saved to the lead researcher’s Open University OneDrive account, except the consent forms. All files except the consent forms will be accessible by the lead researcher’s supervisors at the Open University, through the sharing functionality of OneDrive. I do not believe there is any reason to share the consent forms with my supervisors.

Sharing with a wider research community
This action research project focuses on practice, which is temporally located, situated, and systemic (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 50). Even once the data has been anonymised, therefore, there may be the potential for participants and the research institution to be inferred. As such, it would not be ethical to share all data within a repository which could be accessed by those outside the research team. Furthermore, the participatory action research methodology requires participants to challenge the ways in which the lead researcher records the research: asking participants to review all of the lead researcher’s memos would be a time burden on participants and therefore unethical.

The DCC (2014) lists seven reasons why data should be shared within a research repository. Of these, the opportunity for ‘verification’ is perhaps the most relevant to this project, although given the data analysis methods which acknowledge the active involvement of the researcher in the construction of knowledge (Timonen et al., 2018), verification of process is perhaps less important than transparency of process. As such, all data will be uploaded to ORDO, but there will be restrictions on the ways in which researchers can engage with the data – see comment above. Data relating to the analytical process (memos tracking the process; lists of initial codes and categories) will be the only data which can be shared without restrictions.

### Responsibilities and Resources

**Who will be responsible for data management?**

**Questions to consider:**
- Who is responsible for implementing the DMP, and ensuring it is reviewed and revised?
- Who will be responsible for each data management activity?
- How will responsibilities be split across partner sites in collaborative research projects?
- Will data ownership and responsibilities for RDM be part of any consortium agreement or contract agreed between partners?

The lead researcher will be responsible for data management throughout this project. Participants will be responsible for the management of their Microsoft Office accounts so as to ensure that the documents are not accessed by those outside the participant group.

**What resources will you require to deliver your plan?**

**Questions to consider:**
- Is additional specialist expertise (or training for existing staff) required?
- Do you require hardware or software which is additional or exceptional to existing institutional provision?
- Will charges be applied by data repositories?

No further resources will be required to deliver this plan.
All OU research involving human participants or materials requires assessment by the HREC.

Where you have determined your research requires a full review or you have completed the HREC Project Registration and Risk Checklist and been advised that you will need to complete this form as part of the full review process, please complete and email this form to Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk. Attach any related documents, for example: a consent form, information sheet, questionnaire, or publicity leaflet to ensure that the HREC Review Panel has everything they need to carry out a full review. If there are more than one group of participants, relevant documents for each research group need to be included.

The deadline for applications is every Wednesday at 5.30pm. Applications are then sent to the HREC Review Panel with a minimum response time of 21 working days. However, the process can take a month or longer, so when planning your research and ethics application, you need to build in sufficient time for the HREC review to avoid any delays to your research. Particularly, when you are planning overseas travel or interviews with participants as it is essential that no potential participants are approached until your research has been fully assessed by the HREC.

Please complete all the sections below – deleting the instructions in italics.

### Project identification and rationale

**1. Title of project**

HOW DOES INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT LITERACY AFFECT TEACHERS' ASSESSMENT PRACTICES, IN AN F.E NETWORKED LEARNING CONTEXT?

**2. Abstract**

Assessment and feedback are widely understood to be contested areas in education: repeatedly cited as a negative aspect from a student perspective; widely understood as a process fraught with difficulties from a teaching practitioner perspective. The research literature recognises this and, in an effort to improve perceptions of assessment and feedback, there has been a reconceptualization of feedback and assessment processes, moving away from a 'transmission' model (Nicol, 2010, p. 502) towards a learner centred approach (Carless and Winstone, 2020). Within this reconceptualization, students are encouraged to change their assessment and feedback practices, and to reconsider the importance of dialogue (Nicol, 2010), and active engagement with the assessment process (Price et al, 2011).

However, if students are required to reconsider their approach to assessment and feedback, teachers need to as well. This research shifts the focus away from students, and considers the impact of this reconceptualization on teaching practitioners and FE institutions. This research will consider the extent to which this reconceptualization is understood by teaching practitioners. The primary research question focuses on the institutional factors which have an impact on the articulation and implementation of assessment and feedback policy, thereby assessing the assessment literacy of the institution itself.
3. Investigators

Principal Investigator/ (or Research Student): Susannah Wilson (Open University).

Other researcher(s):

For students only:
Please note that this application cannot be processed without your supervisor’s signature and supporting comments which should be provided below:

EdD Students: Please note that your application must be signed by your OU supervisor

Postgraduate research degree: e.g. EdD

Personal identifier D2762457

Supervisor Maria Fernandez-Toro / Lore Gallastegi

Supervisor’s Email address Maria.fernandez-toro@open.ac.uk / lore.gallastegi@open.ac.uk

Supervisor’s electronic signature:

Supervisor’s supporting comments:
As one of Susie’s supervisors I support her application to the Ethics Committee. Both supervisors have discussed the ethics and the processes required to undertake the research included in the application and I am confident that Susie is fully aware of the ethics related to her research and the steps she needs to undertake to avoid any risks to participants or the data she collects.

Research protocol

4. Schedule

Time frame for the research and its data collection phase(s):

From: May 2021               To: February 2022

Earliest date participants will be contacted: 15 May 2021

5. Methodology

My research questions are as follows:

1. *What factors have an impact on the articulation and implementation of formative feedback policy within a further education (FE) networked learning context?*

2. *How do teaching practitioners implement assessment and feedback practices across the college, at the FE learning level?*

3. *How appropriate is situational analysis as a method of researching socially constructed aspects of institutional work?*

Please see appendix A for my methodology table, which outlines the data collection method, data analysis method, timeline and link to research questions for each stage of the research. Appendix B shows a more complete timeline for the second stage of the research – the action research meetings.

Stage 1: Timeline interviews:

Timeline interviews, as explored by Adriansen (2012), will be used as a preliminary stage in the research process. This method of interviewing focuses on the visual representation of a timeline onto which relevant life events – both personal for the participant and wider contextual events - are plotted and explored. The aim of this stage of research is three-fold:

i) A method of exploring my participants’ teaching identities, given the importance of identity to the assessment and feedback process, as articulated within my literature review.

ii) A method of exploring and articulating participants’ understanding of the context in which their professional lives are framed.

iii) A method of setting the collaborative, participatory tone of the research project
The timeline interview method allows interviewees to “take ownership of the timeline interview” (Adriansen, 2012, p. 48) in terms of the physical drawing of and writing on the timeline. The visual timeline “serves as a ‘collective memory’” (Adriansen, 2012, p. 42), allowing the interview to become a “collective process”. The shared visual representation of the discussion contrasts sharply to the private notes made by the interviewer during a traditional interviewer (Adriansen, 2012, p. 48), further emphasising the collaborative process in which interviewer and interviewee are engaged.

**Stage 2: Action research spiral:**

The action research spiral, as articulated by Kemmis et al. (2014, p. 18) has been identified within Appendix A as a main data collection method. Within the regular participant meetings, participants will come together first to explore their understandings of assessment and feedback, and then to articulate the areas in which they wish to explore within their own practice, with a view to exploring solutions to areas which are problematic.

Othieno et al. (2012, p. 5) assert that “various methods” can be used to “facilitate the discussions and encourage participation”, including “focus group discussions, brainstorming, role plays, market-place discussions, spider diagrams and Venn diagrams”. However, given that “responsibility for the research is taken collectively, by people who act and research together” (Kemmis et al, 2014, p. 16), it is not possible for the methods to be specified in any more detail at this stage. Although I will take a role in facilitating and encouraging participation, action research requires “actors and objects of the research” to be “involved together in an emancipatory frame” (Bradshaw et al., 2014, p. 4). As such, the specific methods through which the action research spiral will be realised cannot be specified without the participants’ input, although it is certain that the chosen methods will focus on “possibilities for dialogue” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 16).

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**6. Participants**

I am aiming to recruit between 5 and 8 participants.

Participants will be eligible to take part in this research project providing that they meet the following criteria:

1. That they are responsible for the delivery of at least one SQA unit or course at SCQF level 6 or below at the research institution in the first semester of academic year 2021/22.

2. That the delivery of the unit or course is done in a ‘networked’ learning context, by which we mean that learners and tutors will not necessarily be working from the same college centre, and that video-conferencing software and the virtual learning environment (VLE) will be used for teaching and learning.

3. That they are in at least their second year of teaching at the research institution

4. That they perceive assessment and feedback practices within the research institution to be worthy of consideration, and that they have a desire to explore assessment and feedback within their practice.

The first two criteria have been set in order to ensure that the findings of the project are relevant to the context explored within the literature review. The specific reference to one awarding body has been made in order to provide common ground within the participant group; the research institution delivers courses from multiple awarding bodies, so this criterion will allow meaning to be shared between participants. Criterion three has been set in order to reduce the potential burden for participants. Criterion four aligns with the critical participatory action research methodology of this project: McTaggart (1994, p. 316) asserts that such action...
research is only possible when members of the group hold “an imperfectly understood felt concern and a desire to take action” within a specified area.

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### 7. Recruitment procedures

Recruitment will be focused at all teaching practitioners who meet the criteria outlined above.

Three main recruitment methods will be used:

1. An article within our institution’s monthly email newsletter
2. An article within the Learning and Teaching Academy (LTA)’s newsletter
3. Snowball sampling

1. The project will be advertised through our institution’s monthly email newsletter (please see Appendix C for an example article using the institution’s template). Within this newsletter, basic information about the project will be provided, and those lecturers who are interested will be asked to make contact with me (the Principal Investigator) for further information. In order to provide as much information as possible at this stage, a link to a video in which I explain more detail about the project ([https://stream.uhi.ac.uk/Player/dhEH7G2b](https://stream.uhi.ac.uk/Player/dhEH7G2b)) will be provided within the newsletter, too.

2. The research institution also has a Learning and Teaching Academy (LTA), for whom providing information about research projects is part of their remit. Their newsletters regularly summarise research projects which are being undertaken, and invite potential participants to get in touch. I will use this mechanism to advertise this research project as well.

3. I will also use ‘snowball sampling’ – a process in which existing participants provide contact information of other potential participants. This method of recruitment is appropriate to the participatory action research methodology, given that such research requires participants to represent the stakeholder group whose experience is being investigated (Genat, 2009, p. 105). It is important that I do not overlook potential participants due to the limits of my knowledge of colleagues within the organisation. It is also appropriate to the underpinning methodology because CPAR to share analytical power with participants (Howell, 2015); snowball sampling demands that the researcher “relinquishes a considerable amount of control over the sampling phase to the informants” (Noy, 2008, p. 332).

In practice, this means that participants will be asked if they know of any other lecturers for whom the project might be “highly significant” (Genat, 2009, p. 106). Mindful of the fact that a direct approach by me might put pressure on lecturers, and wutherefore be unethical, I would ask those who had suggested the potential participants to make contact with the potential participants regarding the research project, and ask them to make contact with me if they were interested in finding out more.

I am aware that, given my position as a Curriculum Lead within the research institution, there is a possible risk of coercion in the recruitment and consent processes. I have chosen these recruitment methods in order to avoid directly approaching potential participants, and therefore to minimise the risk of coercion.

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### 8. Recompense to participants

n/a
9. Consent

Please see attached consent form and participant information sheet.

10. Location(s) of data collection

Both stages of the research will be conducted through the research institution (Argyll College UHI)’s synchronous communication technology, Webex Meetings. This method of online synchronous communication has been chosen for three main reasons:

i) Given the restrictions caused by the global Covid-19 pandemic, face-to-face meetings may be unethical as they may increase the potential for transmission of Covid-19. Research which is to be done using face-to-face methods may deter vulnerable people from participating in the study.

ii) Given the restrictions caused by the global Covid-19 pandemic, face-to-face meetings may be unethical as they may increase potential participants’ anxiety regarding participation in the study.

iii) Given the large geographic spread of the research institution’s learning centres, and the fact that the potential participants may be located near any one of the local learning centres, asking participants to travel to attend group meetings would be an unacceptable imposition on their time, making the research unethical. Asking participants to travel to a central location might deter some participants from participating in the research.

All staff teaching further education (FE) courses – the focus of this study – use the Webex software as part of their routine teaching delivery. I am confident, therefore, that conducting the research through the Webex software will not impose a barrier to participation.

11. Literature review

This research relates to the widely-cited dissatisfaction with assessment and feedback processes felt by students (Bell and Brooks, 2018) and staff. Previous academic work has attempted to identify possible reasons for this dissatisfaction – for example, exploring the extent to which feedback is viewed as an “input message” (Nicol, 2010, p. 502) or a “behaviourist input-output model” (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p. 81). It has been suggested that these views of feedback do not align well with values found elsewhere in the educational system; a recent reconceptualization of assessment and feedback encourages us to consider the process from a “learner-centred” approach (Carless and Winstone, 2020). With this approach, learners are encouraged to actively engage with their feedback, and curriculum design is seen as key to allowing this engagement.

Such a reconceptualization, however, risks a ‘deficit conception’ of teacher feedback literacy, if teachers are not able to design learning opportunities and learning sequences to allow for this active engagement. Furthermore, this reconceptualization has focused primarily on learners and teachers within a higher education (HE) context. This research focuses on the further education (FE) context, and will explore the extent to which teaching practitioners incorporate...
aspects of this learner-centred approach to their teaching and the extent to which the institutional policies support or hinder teaching practitioners to do so.

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**Key Ethics considerations**

**12. Published ethics and legal guidelines to be followed**

This research will follow the guidelines produced by BERA (2018) and the principles produced by the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS, 2015). Links to both of these can be found within the ‘references’ section at the end of this application.

**13. Data protection and information security**

For a full and detailed account of measures that will be taken for data protection and information security, please see my attached data management plan (DMP).

To summarise the key points:

There are two stages to this research project: stage 1 – timeline interviews; stage 2 – the action research spiral.

Prior to stage 1, the following data will be collected:

- Participant consent forms including personal data (name/email address of each participant) and an identifying four digit number, randomly generated. Saved as .pdf files on CD-R storage device. Two copies will be made: one stored in locked storage in the office of the lead researcher. Back-up CD-R will be held in locked storage at the lead researcher’s home.

- Pseudonym file – saved as .docx document. This file will list the randomly generated identifying number discussed above. For each identifying number, an identifying acronym will also be assigned (one which does not relate to the participant initials). Participants will also be invited to choose a pseudonym and, if they choose one, this will be listed within this file. The file will be saved within the lead researcher’s Open University OneDrive account. No identifying details will be stored within this file.

In order to identify participants, both the consent form and the pseudonym file will be required. To enhance data security, they will not be stored together, and the data with identifying details (name/email address) will be kept in locked storage conditions. This will ensure that identifying details of the participants will not be made public.

Stage 1 will collect the following data:

- Pictorial image of timeline – saved as .pdf document. One per participant.
- Audiovisual recording of each interview conducted through Webex software. Saved as MP4 file.
Stage 2 will collect the following data:

- Minutes and agendas. One per meeting, circulated by email to all participants pre and post meeting. Saved as .docx file.
- Electronic documents which serve to generate dialogue and discussion, e.g. mind maps, generated through whiteboard function on Webex. Images will be saved as .png.
- Audiovisual recordings of each meeting. Saved as MP4 file.
- Transcript produced by Webex software – initially saved as .vtt file, then deleted once a copy has been made (see below).
- Second copy of .docx file, which will be anonymised at the point of saving (and transcription mistakes will be corrected).
- Lead researcher’s memos – initially handwritten, typed up and saved as .docx document. After each meeting.
- NVIVO coding documents.

All data will be stored within my OneDrive storage area linked to my Open University Office 365 account. Files will be backed up onto a CD-R storage device each month, and stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office.

The exception to this will be the consent forms, which, given the amount of identifying information contained with them, will be stored only on CD-R storage devices (separate to the back-up). Two copies will be made: one stored in locked storage in the office of the lead researcher. Back-up CD-R will be held in locked storage at the lead researcher’s home.

It will be my responsibility to make the back-up files each month.

**Storage and preservation information**

The Open University require data to be preserved for a minimum of ten years after the completion of the research. In order to meet this requirement, the data generated by this project will be held in Open Research Data Online (ORDO) – the Open University research repository. However, there is no requirement to share the data if, as is the case for the timeline interview transcripts and the pictorial images of the timeline, they contain potentially identifying information. As such, these documents will be kept under permanent embargo, although a metadata-only record will be kept and shared within ORDO.

Furthermore, upon completion of my thesis, audio recordings of the interviews and the CD-R disks containing the consent forms will be destroyed for ethical reasons. As stated elsewhere within this plan, the recording software will produce an initial transcript of the meetings, which will be destroyed as soon as the second transcription has been made by the lead researcher. This second transcription will not retain any identifying details of participants. In this way, only data that has had identifying details removed will be retained.

Further foreseeable research uses are limited due to the participatory methodology and the fact that all participants would be required to have active involvement in subsequent research. I will put restricted access on the data, so that researchers have to contact me to request permission to access.
the data. In this way, I will be able to control how the data is used/re-used – I would allow access to the data to read/interpret/verify, and would discuss the potential for re-use of the data on a case by case basis. I will use the creative commons (CC) licence types to state the extent of data sharing; these licence types are widely used and understood, and have been chosen to ensure understanding and compliance. Should I leave the Open University, the data will remain within ORDO for the ten years, as required.

14. Research data management, disseminating and publishing research outcomes

*Please see the data management plan (DMP) which has been submitted with this application.*

15. Deception

n/a

16. Risk of harm

I do not foresee any significant risks to participants or the lead researcher. However, Banegas and Villacanas de Castro (2015, p. 61) assert that it “may be dangerous for a researcher…to impose on colleagues their own innovative, liberating and emancipatory agenda when others involved seem to be content with the professional environment they inhabit”. I believe that there is sufficient discontent within our professional environment within the arena of assessment and feedback: there have been multiple reforms within recent years, including the introduction of a new mandatory cover sheet, and anecdotal evidence of which I am aware due to my position as an insider researcher suggests that this is a problematic area for teaching practitioners. I believe, therefore, that I will not be falling foul of Banengas and Villacanas de Castro (2015)’s warning.

An additional issue specifically with action research is that research participants may not know “to whom they are consenting”, given the “multiple roles” held by the lead researcher (myself) (Gelling and Munn-Giddings, 2011, p. 104) As an insider-researcher, I am both a colleague and a researcher. Trowsdale (2020) explains how she provided her participants with examples of how she had “used participants’ voices in previous reports”. Although I have no published research available, I have previously conducted research which sought the views of students and staff, and disseminated the research within the institution. By drawing attention to this work, I hope that my participants will “understand how their data might signify” (Trowsdale, 2020), and hope that this will increase my participants’ capacity to give informed consent.

There is an increased risk of distress and unexpected findings due to the global pandemic in which we are all currently operating, and further procedures need to be in place to manage emergency situations. I hope that the ongoing debriefing process, outlined in section 17, below, will also serve as a procedure to manage such emergency or unexpected findings. Further to that outlined in section 17, should I detect any stress of distress in my participants, I will also ensure that my participants are aware of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) helpline - and if I have concerns about somebody’s safety, I will call NHS direct to report my concerns.
For those participants who wish to opt-out of the study during the research process, I will offer support through the research institution’s Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), to which all employees have access.

17. Debriefing

Debriefing relates to the well-being of participants, and “attempts to return participants to, at minimum, the same emotional, psychological or physical state they were in when they started the research” (MacNallie, 2018). This is relevant to both stages of this research:
- Stage 1 of the research, for example, may cause some negative or unexpected emotion within the participants as they recall previous teaching experiences.
- Stage 2 asks participants to explore how to improve assessment practices, which will naturally involve participants considering the areas of their teaching practice which require improvement, and may invoke negative reactions.

The online research context means that debriefing requires some extra consideration, given that it is more difficult to determine the participants’ emotional or psychological states, because participants and researchers are not in the “same physical location” (MacNallie, 2018). Following MacNallie’s guidance, I will be in email contact with my participants after their stage 1 interview, to provide my contact details should they have any queries, as well as to reiterate information about the study design, the purpose of the study and remind them of the possibility of withdrawing from the study. Such information, according to MacNallie, allows participants to “assess whether they would like to continue their contribution”.

The debriefing process for low risk research, such as this, may simply serve to express gratitude to the participants, to remind participants of the study’s purpose and rationale, and to provide information regarding where participants can “learn about the study’s findings” (MacNallie, 2018). However, my understanding of the CPAR methodology means that participants need to have more of an active role than this, and the debriefing process should reflect this. Participants will play an active role in the articulation of the study findings, and will be invited to reflect on and contribute to the ways in which the meetings are recorded. In order to facilitate this, I will email participants after each of the group meetings with a copy of the ‘minutes’. I will use this email contact as a routine opportunity to engage with participants individually, and to informally monitor their well-being through informal conversation. I will also be able to incorporate such informal discussion into the start of each meeting, and will be able to privately offer to remove participants from the study if it was appearing to cause additional stress.

Project Management

18. Research organisation and funding

Funding body: n/a
The advantages of participatory research methodologies relate to their “management of ethical issues encompassing voice and ownership of the research” (Baumfield et al., 2017, p. 11). Despite this, the active involvement of participants “in all stages of the research process”, and the “evolving nature” (Gelling and Munn-Giddings, 2011, p. 101) of action research projects can provide issues when applying for ethical approval. Gelling and Munn-Giddings (2011) apply Emanuel et al. (2000)’s seven requirements for ethical research specifically to the field of action research. The seven requirements, and their implications for this CPAR project are listed below, along with the steps I shall take to mitigate or alleviate these issues.

i)  Value

Gelling and Munn-Giddings (2011, p. 102) consider it an ethical issue for researchers to focus only on those projects which are best placed to increase knowledge and understanding. There is a gap in the literature relating to assessment and feedback in FE learning contexts. Furthermore, the impact of Covid-19 on the teaching environment provides further justification that this research will have the greatest possibility of increasing knowledge that is necessary and important.

The CPAR methodology underpinning this project provides one method of ensuring the value of this research, given that action research is “fundamentally concerned with enquiry into ways of improving practice” (Bradshaw et al., 2014, p. 1). Furthermore, the collaborative and participatory nature of action research “takes teachers out of their traditional isolation” (Sales et al., 2011, p. 912), and produces “findings that can have a greater and more immediate impact” than research that is disconnected from the community (Thomas et al., 2018, p. 539).

ii)  Scientific validity

The scientific validity of research is an ethical issue, given that if a project lacks scientific validity it will also “lack the capacity to produce meaningful results” (Gelling and Munn-Giddings, 2011, p. 102). For Gelling and Munn-Giddings (2011, p. 102), validity is considered with reference to a “thorough approach to planning, undertaking and reporting the research”. Despite Kemmis et al. (2014, p. 18)’s assertion that CPAR is a “disciplined way of making change”, this may be perceived to be problematic with participatory action research, in that the process and progress of the project will be unknown at the point of applying for ethical approval.

However, data collection methods are to be combined with rigorous, systematic analytical methods (Constructivist grounded theory (CGT) and situational analysis (SA)) which will allow dissemination of the results to be done with confidence. These have been chosen in order to overcome the perception that participatory research approaches such as this are “inherently impressionistic and biased due to the involvement of the subjects” (Baumfield, 2017, p. 11).

CPAR methodology is characterised by the involvement of participants “actively in all stages of the research process and the evolving nature of the research methods” (Gelling and Munn-Giddings, 2011, p. 101), and by projects in which “responsibility for the research is taken collectively, by people who act and research together” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 16). The absence of a rigid outline of methods at the time of applying for ethical approval should therefore reassure the research ethics committee given that they assert that “it is essential that you do not advertise for, or attempt to recruit, potential participants until you have received a formal response from HREC” (Open University, 2021).
iii) Fair participant selection

Fair participant selection has been covered within section seven of this ethics form (Recruitment procedures).

The data analysis method of situational analysis should provide some comfort to a committee worried about voices being excluded from the project. One explicit focus within situational analysis is on the social worlds in the “situation of inquiry” (Clarke, 2019, p. 16). The goal here is “to map all the major social worlds, organizations, and institutions”, with a particular focus on “implicated actors (who) can be physically present but silenced, or wholly absent” (p. 17). This focus allows us to state that, despite the fact that the participant group will be solely made up of teaching practitioners, the voices of other actors within the situation will be incorporated and considered, due to this analytical method which explicitly engages “with complexities and relationalities”, and makes “serious attempts to represent them clearly” (Clarke, 2019 p. 25).

iv) Favourable risk-benefit ratio

CPAR is “guided by an interest in emancipating people and groups from irrationality, unsustainability and injustice” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 14), and by a desire to make social practices “more rational and reasonable, more productive and sustainable and more just and inclusive” Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 3). The intended benefits of this research, then, should align with this ethical requirement.

Furthermore, the timeline interviews offer participants an opportunity to interrogate and reflect upon their professional identities. Such reflection may form part of the participants’ applications for registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, which is becoming a mandatory requirement for lecturers within Scotland’s Colleges. For those participants who are already registered, such reflection could become an important part of their application for Professional Update, which those who are registered with the GTCS are required to do every five years.

All lecturers registered with the GTCS are required to take part in critical enquiry within their professional practice. My participants will be able to refer to this research project to demonstrate engagement with critical enquiry.

v) Independent review

This proposed project will go through two ethical approval processes: one at the Open University, and one at the research institution, the University of the Highlands and Islands. Gelling and Munn-Giddings (2011, p. 104) suggest that, for action research projects, the review should be for the main project – but that an “REC should make a judgement call about whether subsequent reviews are required”. I hope that, given the ease with which these other listed requirements can be met, subsequent reviews will not be considered necessary, but will follow any requests for subsequent reviews should they be required.

vi) Informed consent

The participant information sheet can only inform participants of the initial exploratory stage, given that, within AR, “the “future direction …is often unknown after the initial exploratory stage” (Gelling and Munn-Giddings, 2011, p. 105). Furthermore, the research methods beyond the initial stage are also unknown. Given these difficulties, Gelling and Munn-Giddings (2011, p. 105) suggest that “a different approach” is required, “based on a process of negotiation where both parties are as flexible as possible”.

As such, I will be requesting consent from my participants prior to the start of the research project, as is standard practice. I will also be in contact, either by telephone or by online synchronous methods, with each participant individually after each of the group meetings.
will seek to ensure that the participants understand and are happy with the decisions made within the meetings, and remind them of the possibility of opting-out of the research at any stage. Within these individual discussions, I will explore the potential impact of the agreed actions on each participant’s practice.

vii) Respect for enrolled participants

The participatory methodology of this project has been chosen to overcome the criticism that action research “may be carried out for the purposes of a programme or assignment rather than for the authentic needs of the teacher” (Bradshaw, 2014, p. 11). Mindful of Banegas and Villacanas de Castro (2015)’s warning that researchers may “impose…their own innovative, liberating and emancipatory agenda”, the participatory nature of this research is “based on a long-term commitment to working together” (Sales et al., 2011).

20. Benefits and knowledge transfer

CPAR methodology brings value due to its capacity to “connect ordinary people with social movements, changing the communities and societies around them” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 13). Relevant social movements to which this research will connect the participants include the shift within the research community in the conceptualisation of assessment and feedback participants, and the potential changes being brought in by the global pandemic. The value of this research can therefore be described at an individual level, an institutional level, and a societal level.

21. Supporting documents

Include as attachments, any documents related to your research proposal. Add the HREC reference number to each (if already known), and list below, for example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Description</th>
<th>✔️</th>
<th>☐</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consent form and Participant information sheet – for each participant group</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email or letter from the organisation agreeing that the research can take place</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft bid or project outline</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity leaflet</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22. Declaration

I declare that:

- The research will conform to the above protocol and that I will inform the HREC of any significant changes or new ethics issues and have these agreed before they are implemented.
I have read and will adhere to the following OU policy:

- OU Code of Practice for Research – (see the Research Ethics Guidelines page)
- OU Ethics Principles for Research with Human Participants - (see the Research Ethics Guidelines page)

Principal Investigator(s)  
Susannah Wilson

Faculty  
Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS)

Telephone

E-mail  
Susannah.wilson@open.ac.uk

Signature(s)  
Susannah Wilson  
(scanned or electronic)

Date  
04.05.21

References referred to within ethics application


HREC Final report

At the end of an HREC reviewed research project, Principal Investigators are required to assess their research for any ethics-related issues and/or major changes. Where these have occurred, the PI should return a completed copy of the HREC final report form to Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk.

Final reports are confidential and only made available to the HREC Chair and Committee members, and are requested to inform the HREC process, to assess how any ethics-related issues and major changes have been dealt with and to ensure OU research has been carried out as agreed. If you could add the date when your research is due to finish below, you will be sent a reminder.

Proposed date for final report: __________________________________________

NB. Research students should enter their end of research project date

Research ethics applications - collection and use of data

Information provided as part of a research ethics application, e.g. from research students or staff, is stored so the HREC has an accurate record. All data is managed and held securely by the Research Ethics Administrative Team and only shared with HREC members as part of the research ethics review process. Occasionally, and only where relevant, applications are discussed with other OU research review panels, e.g. the Student Research Project Panel (SRPP) and Staff Survey Project Panel (SSPP), predominately to avoid delays where applications are being made simultaneously.

If, as part of a research ethics application sensitive personal data is disclosed, it will be stored securely and only shared as above. If such data is volunteered but then needs to be withdrawn, the researcher should contact Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk. More information is available in the OU Student privacy notice and Staff, workers and applicants privacy notice.

Appendix C

Title: Call for participants in a research project about assessment and feedback

Are you a member of teaching staff who is interested in assessment and feedback? Susannah Wilson (Tutor at Argyll College) is conducting a research project into assessment and feedback practices within the further education (FE) learning context. Susannah is looking for participants to join an action research group, to come together to discuss the ways in which they include assessment and feedback into their teaching practice, and to explore the challenges of assessment and feedback. Further information about the project can be found here - https://stream.uhi.ac.uk/Player/dhEH7G2b

If you require further information, please contact Susannah Wilson by email - susannah.wilson@uhi.ac.uk.
Appendix G: focus of the action research meetings

NB as articulated within chapter 3, there were two dates given for each meeting, which were named e.g. meeting 1a and 1b. Participants were invited to attend whichever was more convenient for them.

| Meetings 1a and 1b | September 2021 | Focus: introduction to the project; introduction to each other; articulation of assessment practices at F.E. Beginning to articulate both challenges and strengths, as well as potential solutions. |
| Meetings 2a and 2b | October 2021 | Focus: recap of assessment practices at F.E – invitation to discuss any aspect of assessment practice that participants had been considering since our last meeting. Invitation to discuss the extent to which participants feel that they have agency over their assessment practices. Start of the articulation of possible solutions/problems on which to focus. |
| Meetings 3a and 3b | November 2021 | Focus: the SQA consultation questions and our responses. We rewrote the responses I had drafted so as to correctly articulate our views. |
| Meetings 4a and 4b | December 2021 | Focus: participants were invited to share how their thinking about assessment practices had developed. They discussed how they had learnt from each other. They discussed where they had been implementing changes to their assessment practices. The focus shifted towards the role of the institution in terms of staff training and from where lecturers learnt about formative assessment. Participants clearly articulated their desire to produce something that would be of use to new lecturers who did not know about formative assessment. |
| Meetings 5a and 5b | January 2022 | Focus: participants came to the meeting ready to design an informative resource for new staff. |
| Meetings 6a and 6b | February 2022 | A debrief or concluding meeting. Participants were invited to share anything they felt they hadn’t been able to articulate about assessment practices or how they implemented assessment practices. Nothing significantly different was raised or reported. |

Initial coding of these meetings suggested that agency might be a relevant topic to explore further.

Initial coding of these meetings suggested that participants were focusing on the role of the awarding body and the CfE – these had both been a focus within both meetings 1 and 2. As such, I contacted my participants by email after the October meetings to suggest that we contribute to the awarding body consultation as part of our action research focus – this was agreed to by all participants. I drafted the initial consultation responses using the transcripts from the first meetings and emailed them to all participants prior to the November meetings.

After meeting 3a, I sent the revised responses to those who had not attended meeting 3a. After meeting 3b I sent the revised responses to those who had attended meetings 3a. We discussed some finer points by email and then agreed (by email) the final responses.
### Appendix H: Glossary of definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definitions:</th>
<th>According to:</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formative assessment</strong></td>
<td><em>Something “for the students to learn from”</em>.</td>
<td><em>Research participant</em></td>
<td><strong>Broad alignment between these definitions, which show a strong link between formative assessment and teaching. The definitions include reference to the ways in which formative assessment is used by both learners and lecturers.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>a tool to show them (the student) that they are responsible for their learning</em>.</td>
<td><em>Research participant</em></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>a way of teaching</em>.</td>
<td><em>Research participant</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>my way of seeing who has and has not got gaps in their learning</em>.</td>
<td><em>Research participant</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>A key part of the teaching process</em>.</td>
<td><em>Research participant</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Teachers make use of formative assessment data to inform their next steps in teaching, while pupils can gauge their own progress in achieving the learning outcomes</em> (Wallace et al., 2007, p. 1)</td>
<td><em>Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning and Institution of Education, University of Stirling. Report available through the Scottish Qualifications Authority</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Verbs relating to teaching</strong></td>
<td><em>preparing them (the student) to go on and so something else</em>*.</td>
<td><em>Research participant</em></td>
<td><strong>Variety of verbs, emphasising the responsibility of the learner to different degrees.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>improve students’ knowledge</em>*.</td>
<td><em>Research participant</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>(teaching) is not something that you do at them, it’s something that they’re a participant in</em>.</td>
<td><em>Research participant</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>helps our children and young people gain the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for life in the 21st century</em> (Education Scotland, 2023).</td>
<td><em>Education Scotland</em></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| The lecturer’s role (relating to assessment) | “As long as I tell them what they should be learning, and ask if they’re okay, and give them plenty of opportunity for saying ‘hey, I don’t understand that’, then it’s not kind of my job to be checking up on them all the time”. | Research participant | There is tension between some of the research participants’ understanding of role of a lecturer – one definition puts more emphasis on the lecturer’s responsibility for ensuring that learning has occurred, one places more emphasis on the learners. The SNCT understanding emphasises the lecturer’s responsibility.

The research participants’ understanding focuses on the lecturers’ responsibility for their learners; the Scottish Government understanding is broader, asking the lecturer to consider the way in which their teaching aligns with that of other teaching professionals. |
| “If I didn’t have a flavour or know the zone (they were in)... I would probably feel quite uncomfortable”. | Research participant |
| “our responsibility is to ensure that the students understand the feedback that has been given to them”. | Research participant |
| “motivating students” | Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) |
| (a) manage and organise classes through planning and preparing for teaching and learning. (b) assess, record and report on the work of pupils’ progress to inform a range of teaching and learning approaches
c (c) prepare pupils for examinations and where required, assist with their administration (SNCT, 2017). | Scottish Government |
<p>| “At school level, teachers need to have opportunities to discuss and share expectations across the curriculum with a view to achieving |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The role of the awarding body</th>
<th>“<em>they’re just making sure that the student meets their criteria</em>”</th>
<th>Research participant</th>
<th>The view of the research participants was that the awarding body has a singular role to play. The awarding body itself considers its role to be much wider, as do other communities in the landscape of assessment.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“<em>Our purpose is to help people fulfil their potential and maintain standards across Scottish education</em>” (SQA, n.d.)</td>
<td>Scottish Qualifications Authority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Develop, maintain, and improve a framework of qualifications, and to set and maintain standards for many other awarding bodies, and accredited qualifications” (SQA, n.d.)</td>
<td>Scottish Qualifications Authority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“• Accredits, assesses and awards qualifications. • Devises and develops qualifications and assessments. • Provides qualifications to support all learners. • Approves and quality assures centres (secondary schools, colleges, training providers and employers (private and public sector)) who are approved to deliver SQA qualifications. • Delivers SQA qualifications. • Certificates qualifications. • Provides consultancy services. • Delivers contract services” (Muir, 2022, p. 24).</td>
<td>Professor Kenneth Muir, Independent Advisor to the Scottish Government on Education Reform.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“External Verification is carried out by SQA to ensure that: &gt; national standards are being uniformly applied”</td>
<td>Scottish Government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aims of the curriculum for excellence (CfE)</td>
<td>“pushing every child in Scotland or my perception is that we’re pushing every child in Scotland to achieve beyond what they can see. themselves achieving to reach goals and boundaries further than their own expectations and aspirations”</td>
<td>Research participant</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“The two key priorities for CfE are: • ensuring the best possible progression in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing for every child and young person; and • closing the attainment gap”. (Education Scotland, 2016).</td>
<td>HM Chief Inspector of Education, published by Education Scotland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scotland’s curriculum – Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) – helps our children and young people gain the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for life in the 21st century (Education Scotland, 2023).</td>
<td>Education Scotland.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reality of the CfE</td>
<td>“we’re very quickly saying okay, this is the level that we’re kind of seeing you sitting at, and that’s okay, and we’ll help you work to that level. And we’ll put things in place that allows you to</td>
<td>Research participant</td>
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<tr>
<td>go and look at things that you, like, do</td>
<td>a level that you feel comfortable with”</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serving multiple stakeholders</th>
<th>Focused code</th>
<th>Initial code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple requirements</td>
<td>Different assessment mechanisms within courses</td>
<td>Lecturers preparing students for multiple outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within lecturers’ role</td>
<td>Supporting students to achieve a qualification</td>
<td>Preparing students for employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preparing students for employment</td>
<td>Meeting the needs of a variety of students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preparing students for HE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of coherence</td>
<td>Awarding body does not support progression to HE or employment</td>
<td>Metaskills irrelevant to awarding body paperwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between systems</td>
<td>Learning-focused assessment mechanisms don’t fit paperwork</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment to the detriment</td>
<td>Pass/fail mechanism unhelpful to learners</td>
<td>Summative assessment pressure on learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of learning</td>
<td>High summative assessment requirements of awarding body</td>
<td>Prescriptive evidence requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension between</td>
<td>CfE doesn’t support individual learners</td>
<td>CfE not working in practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curriculum and FE practice</td>
<td>CfE good in theory</td>
<td>CfE working in other contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implementation of CfE depending on team</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Isolated practice</td>
<td>Unshared perspectives</td>
<td>Awarding body not valuing formative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategies needed to engage students with formative</td>
<td>Students not engaging with formative assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of trust in awarding body</td>
<td>Lack of trust in prior verification process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lecturers disillusioned by awarding body</td>
<td>Lecturers disillusioned by awarding body</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Having to teach to an assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working without clarity</td>
<td>Confusion regarding formative assessment</td>
<td>Absence of clear paperwork</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Awarding body requirements unclear</td>
<td>Feeling apprehensive due to lack of clarity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Needing clearer guidance re. requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inconsistent support</td>
<td>Gaps in institutional support for anything but summative</td>
<td>Relying on individuals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Relying on individuals</td>
<td>Awareness of institutional resources</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Believing support needs to be improved</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited trust in institution</td>
<td>Unwilling to engage about improving practice</td>
<td>Cautious about producing good practice guidelines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling restricted</td>
<td>Restrictive requirements of the awarding body</td>
<td>Rigid or static evidence requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bureaucratic nature of assessment requirements</td>
<td>High summative assessment requirements of awarding body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High summative assessment requirements – impact on lecturers</td>
<td>High summative assessment requirements – impact on lecturers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pass/fail mechanism restricts lecturer feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>Table Cell</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prescriptive evidence requirements</td>
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<td>Prescriptive senior phrase curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prior verification process is a barrier</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outdated or inaccurate specification documents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional restrictions on practice</td>
<td>Overcomplicated systems restrict practice</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>‘One size fits all’ attitude from institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling isolated due to management structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional support limited to summative assessment</td>
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<td>College not reflecting</td>
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<td>Senior colleagues not supporting lecturers to implement values</td>
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<td>Risk of innovations leading to future restrictions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invisible restrictions</td>
<td>Not having time to improve assessment situation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Awarding body focus prevents holistic approach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of professionalism</td>
<td>Taking responsibility</td>
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<td>Striving to improve practice</td>
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<td>Taking responsibility for improving</td>
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<td>Taking responsibility for learning</td>
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<td>Taking responsibility outwith own classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using a wide lens to view practice</td>
<td>Lecturers considering learners’ wider lives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Considering assessment as one part of the jigsaw</td>
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<tr>
<td>Considering student motivation</td>
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<td>Teaching something that won’t be assessed</td>
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<td>Working as individuals</td>
<td>Establishing what works as individual lecturers</td>
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<td>Creating their own assessment paperwork</td>
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<td>Lecturers working creatively</td>
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<td>Rejecting a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach</td>
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<td>Wanting to use professional judgement</td>
<td>Fear of top-down processes</td>
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<td>Fearing processes which restrict practice</td>
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<td>Lecturers wanting more autonomy</td>
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<td>Reluctance to accept fixed assessment practices</td>
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<td>Wanting to have a voice</td>
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<td>Rejecting the need for clearer guidance re. requirements</td>
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<td>Support structures</td>
<td>Observing practice</td>
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<td>Being observed</td>
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<td>Observing others</td>
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<td>Benefitting from dialogue</td>
<td>Dialogue with colleagues cultivating reflective practice</td>
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<td>Benefitting from cross-curricular dialogue</td>
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<td>Dialogue with colleagues as professional learning (PL)</td>
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<td>Impact of others</td>
<td>Positive impact of others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acknowledging action research meetings as support</td>
<td>Action research meetings allowing cross-curricular dialogue</td>
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<td>Action research meetings allowing questions</td>
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<td>Action research meeting dialogue provides clarification</td>
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<td>Action research meetings providing suggestions</td>
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<td>Action research meetings having an impact on practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benefitting from teacher education courses</td>
<td>Learning from the content of the courses</td>
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<td>Learning from peers on the courses</td>
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<td>Seeking change</td>
<td>Desire for change within awarding body</td>
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<tr>
<td>Desire for change in FE landscape</td>
<td>Working outside the system to fulfil professional values</td>
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<td>Feeling supported to enact change</td>
<td>Feeling supported by line manager</td>
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<td>Institutional culture supporting challenge</td>
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<td>Lecturers working collaboratively</td>
<td>Collaborative working between lecturers</td>
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<td>Recognising the limits of working as individuals</td>
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<td>Not believing change is possible</td>
<td>Feeling empowered to make change</td>
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<td>Believing awarding body to be the barrier to change</td>
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<td>Believing ‘the system’ cannot be changed</td>
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<td>Believing lecturers cannot effect change.</td>
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