Continuing professional development for social workers: Social worker or organisation LED? Whose choice?

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The thesis investigates social workers' perspectives on Continuing Professional Development (CPD), focusing on how decisions about CPD are made, who makes them and the facilitators and constraints that govern these choices. The study acknowledges the regulatory requirement since 2021 for social workers in England to document and record two CPD activities annually to maintain their registration to practice.

The study conducted primary qualitative research with twenty-one social work practitioners in England at various stages in their careers.

The research data were collected in 2021/22 during COVID 19 Pandemic, with the shift to a virtual "socially distanced" approach displacing face-to-face interaction in fieldwork for the study as well as for practitioners to access CPD opportunities.

Fieldwork was carried out using semi-structured narrative interviews that captured the voices and lived experiences of participants. Reflexive thematic analysis of data (Braun and Clarke, 2020) highlights an array of opportunities, challenges, and realities social workers' encounter in their practice with service users, alongside juggling work/life balance to meet their CPD requirements.

The study is underpinned by a theoretical framework that interrogates contemporary social work practice from a range of critical perspectives drawing on the sociological imagination (Mills, 1959), emancipatory pedagogies (Freire,1970), having and being as modes of existence (Fromm, 1976) and technologies of power including surveillance, bureaucracy, governmentality, and the production of docile bodies (Foucault, 1977).

The voices of the participants and findings make a unique contribution to the debate on social work practice, a profession in perma-crisis, whose role, value, and survival is being brought into question (Maylea, 2021). The study illustrates that although social workers were keen to take advantage of CPD opportunities, especially in therapeutic and specialist interventionist roles, organisations lacked structure, focus and finance

to facilitate career development. In this context personal initiative and motivation were key factors in making the most of CPD. The study identifies organisational problems such as lack of dedicated study time, heavy caseloads for social workers to manage, organisational and political pressures that restrict access to CPD. Social workers' sense a lack of control and choice over CPD reflects top-down organisationally led approaches. The study calls for more effective responses to make a reality of the aspirations of social work practitioners, many of whom are highly motivated to do better in meeting the needs of service users and more effectively building trust and confidence in the profession, thus working towards fulfilling the commitment to social justice.

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List of Abbreviations

ADSS	Association of Directors of Social Services
ASW	Association of Social Workers
ASYE	Assessed and Supported Year in Employment
BASW	British Association of Social Workers
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BLM	Black Lives Matter
CCETSW	Central Council for Education and Training of Social Work
CoP	Communities of Practice
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPEL	Continuing Professional Education and Learning
CQSW	Certificate of Qualification in Social Work
CSS	Certificate of Social Work
CSW	Chief Social Worker
DfE	Department for Education
DHSC	Department of Health and Social Care
DoH	Department of Health
DipSW	Diploma in Social Work
DOLS	Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards
ECF	Early Career Framework
GSCC	General Social Care Council
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
HEI	Higher Education Institute
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
IT	Information Technology
KSS	Knowledge and Skills Statement
NAAS	National Assessment and Accreditation System
NAPO	National Association of Probation Officers
NHS	National Health Service

NISCC	Northern Ireland Social Care Council
NISW	National Institute for Social Work
NQSW	Newly Qualified Social Worker
PCF	Professional Capabilities Framework
PQSW	Post-Qualifying Social Work
PRTL	Post-Registration Training and Learning
SCIE	Social Care Institute for Excellence
PSDP	Practice Supervisors Development Programme
SCW	Social Care Wales
SSSC	Scottish Social Services Council
SWAN	Social Work Action Network
SWE	Social Work England
SWRB	Social Work Reform Board
SWTF	Social Work Task Force
SWU	Social Workers Union
TCSW	The College of Social Work

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to thesis

This thesis investigates how professionally qualified, registered social workers in England negotiate their Continuing Professional Development (CPD) alongside their role in professional social work. It explores the facilitators and enablers that they consider are supportive and aid their learning and development and examines barriers and challenges they find on their journey.

The study focuses on social worker practitioners who were employed, or self-employed, in a variety of social work roles in England. The research findings offered insight into what factors were positive enablers to facilitating continuing professional development and barriers and challenges that have negative connotations. Additionally, it identified that participants had career aspirations in terms of advanced learning opportunities but there was a lack of organisational structures and funding to achieve these.

This chapter introduces the study, the rationale, and context, as well, as signposting to the later material on the research design, structure of the thesis, and contribution to knowledge.

1.2 The Context of the Research

The thesis investigates practitioners' dual function, that of their day-to-day practice, as well as compliance with the regulatory requirement to undertake and provide evidence annually of continuing professional development to re-register and continue to practise. This section will give a brief overview of the two key context definitions, the arena of social work and continuing professional development to set the arena for context.

1.3 Defining Social Work

It is interesting to note that, since the emergence of social work, an agreed definition of social work has not proved an easy task. Social work operates in a contested arena, leading to authors/theorists varying in their interpretation (Dickens, 2011; Jones, R., 2014; Rode, 2017; McGregor, 2022). In the United Kingdom (UK) social work has been defined by social work scholars (e.g., Payne, 1996, 2006; Dominelli,

1996; Dickens, 2011) professional organisations and, at different times, prescribed and shaped by governments of various political persuasions (Ferguson and Lavalette, 2013).

Social work is a professional task delivered internationally by social workers through varying roles and methods, for instance, casework, therapeutic work, group work, community work or community development initiatives, with each country having its unique way of meeting the circumstances and needs of its citizens (Dominelli, 2009). Reviewing historical accounts of social work, it is evident that principles and practices have been adapted to meet the cultural context of different countries who increasingly celebrate and participate in World Social Work Day in March each year. Having grappled with the diversity of the profession worldwide, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) adopted the following definition in 2014:

> Social work is a practice-based and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing (IFSW, 2014).

The above definition is more comprehensive, considers issues of social justice and human rights, as well as highlights that social work is an academic and practice discipline, underpinned by ethics and values that are at the core of the social work profession. Since 2014 the definition is used by social workers as their benchmark, as well as endorsed by the social work professional association, British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and additionally across the four nations of the UK (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland).

1.4 Defining Continuing Professional Development

Continuing Professional Development refers to post-qualifying professional and personal development with the purpose of building on knowledge, skills, and reflection of practice, attained through formal and informal education and training to build on professionalism. Post-qualifying education and training, particularly in professions, such as law, medicine, teaching, nursing, or social work, can trace forms of CPD in various guises to the 1960s. However, social workers in their practice

increasingly are required to cope with rapid societal changes, globalisation, new technological advances (Halton, Powell, and Scanlan, 2015) and, progressively, the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the workplace (Reamer, 2013; Stone, 2023; Booth, 2024; Koutsounia, 2024). Continuing education, learning, and skills development are pre-requisites to being a competent professional practitioner (BASW, 2018; SWE, 2019). There is a wide range of terminology used for post-qualification education and training, a contested term, whose history will be tracked and explored more in depth in Chapter 2.

For the purpose of this section, I will draw on one early generic definition of continuing professional development that is used by professions. Madden and Mitchell (1993) describe CPD as:

> The maintenance and enhancement of the knowledge, expertise, and competence of professionals throughout their careers according to a plan formulated regarding the needs of professional, employer, the profession and society (Madden and Mitchell, 1993, p.12).

This all-encompassing statement highlights that it is not only about self-improvement but also meets the needs of several other stakeholders, including, importantly service users. The current regulatory body, Social Work England (SWE) (2019), defines CPD as:

> an essential reflection and learning activity. You do CPD throughout your social work career to maintain and improve your practice. Evidencing CPD is an essential part of demonstrating your fitness to practice (SWE, 2019).

The definitions emphasise the importance of learning and development for social workers throughout their careers to build and enhance their knowledge and skills up to date. SWE stresses the importance of social workers critically reflecting on their learning and practice to enhance and demonstrate they are competent and safe practitioners.

1.5 Background to the Research Study

Social Work in the United Kingdom (UK) has been devolved since 1998 to the four nations, England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland that make up the union. Responsibility for social work services regarding children and families, and adult services for England are retained by the Westminster Government and split between the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care. England and Wales share some of the same legislative framework, but also have separate

Acts, such as Care Act 2014 (England) and Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 that offer similar provision. Whereas Scotland and Northern Ireland have separate legal and social policies. Each nation has its own social work education and continuing professional development frameworks, as well as different social work regulators. All policy, funding, accountability, and decision-making are devolved to the four countries that powerfully shape how social work is practised and delivered (Baginsky, 2014b; Kettle, McCusker, Shanks, Ingram, and McCulloch, 2016).

The context of this empirical research will focus on social work practitioners in England. I specifically decided to focus on England as, although I have had some experience of working across the other three nations in the UK, my primary knowledge base, practice, and expertise have been within the English Probation Service and Social Work and Social Care as a practitioner, as well as academic in higher education establishments. In view of this I considered it more appropriate and manageable to focus specifically on one jurisdiction.

1.6 Rationale for the Research Study

Throughout my career in social work from prequalifying to post-qualifying my experience of accessing learning and development, in various roles and personally, has been very positive and rewarding and has helped me to meet my personal and career aspirations. In my various roles, as a practitioner, manager, supervisor and tutor I have always encouraged and facilitated learning for others to ensure that they have had opportunities for advancement and to meet their aspirations. It has been evident since the onset of austerity post 2008, with reduced funding to local authorities, that this has affected opportunities in social work services, education and continuing professional development (Jordon and Drakeford, 2012; BASW, 2017; Lavalette, 2019; Jones, D., 2020).This has lessened opportunities for social work practitioners to access a wide range of developmental opportunities that were hitherto available, especially opportunities to wide perspective by attending out-of-county provision, that also enabled networking and sharing cross-boundary ideas of practice. The majority of training courses offered by organisations/employers appear to primarily focus on ensuring practitioners understand, are competent and confident to deliver the statutory duties of the organisation (e.g., Safeguarding, Data Protection, legislative framework, such as Best Interests, Mental Capacity Act, Counter Terrorism

Prevent Duty), as well as transition to organisational practice frameworks/models of practice in adult and children's services, e.g., Strengths Perspective (Saleebey, 2001); Signs of Safety (Turnball and Edwards, 1999); Restorative Practice (Braithwaite, 1989); Strengthening Families (Kumpfer, Molgaard, and Spoth, 1996). Person-Centred Practice (Rogers, 1963) and Three Conversations (Fawcett, Johnson, Mould, and Ubhi, 2021).

One of the main drivers for conducting this research has been to investigate what is organisationally available to social work practitioners, how do these meet individual learning needs and aspirations, and, importantly, who has the power to decide what type of CPD will be funded and made available within an organisation, and whether it is mandatory, statutory or developmental, and whether social workers have a choice regarding participation. Another driver for undertaking this PhD research has been to explore these areas with those it affects, the social workers, and, consequently, hear their perspectives and through dissemination of their views create a more public profile especially to counter the negative media images portrayed about social workers and their practice, especially decision-making (Staniforth, Fouche and Beddoe, 2014; Leedham, 2022; CC, 2023; SWE, 2024; Hanley, 2025). CPD is not an optional add-on. It is a requirement imposed on social workers in order to meet the statutory requirement of Social Work England (2019), the regulatory authority in England, and essential to continue to be registered as a social worker. To facilitate this requirement CPD should be centre stage within organisations as a provision, especially in view of the ongoing crisis of recruitment and retention of social workers (Moriarty, Manthorpe and Harris,2018; Ravalier, Wainwright, Clabburn, Loon, and Smyth, 2021; Department for Education 2023b; Samuel, 2025). Alongside this there is evidence of high burnout rates of social workers in comparison to other professions (McFadden, 2015b; Hussein, 2018; Health and Safety Executive, 2023).

Completing an approved pre-qualifying social work educational course (e.g. Frontline, Think Ahead, Step-Up, BA, BSc., Masters or Apprenticeship) is seen as the starting point for entry to the social work profession. The course curriculum, whether it should be specialist or generic, is and has been philosophically disputed (Moriarty and Manthorpe, 2013, Croisdale-Appleby, 2014, Narey, 2014). Post-qualification

some Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) attend the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), which is a structured, supported, and supervised programme (2012). Following this there are other educationally accredited options for developing specialisms, such as Practice Educator (PE), Best Interests Assessor (BIA), Approved Mental Health Practitioner (AMHP). However, currently there is no access to a formal career structure plan to enable practitioners to become highly skilled or develop skills that are required to undertake the more specialist roles required in social work mentioned above. The research data, and other recent research data, for instance YouGov (2021), reinforces that the majority of social workers wish to develop their knowledge and skills to enable them to take on specialist roles, such as therapeutic interventions (e.g. trauma), play therapists, cognitive behavioural therapy, or family therapy therapists. Over time, social work practice has become more narrowly focussed on assessments, risk, and management interventions to manage these. This has led to many of the aforementioned roles being outsourced to agencies, which impacts significantly on the well-being of service users, who have multiple individuals in their lives, as well as social workers' status and job satisfaction. It leaves their roles becoming more functional rather than them being in a position to offer holistic and relationship-based interventions. To be able to provide these roles would lead to more satisfaction in the social work role, as well as a cheaper option in the longer run for the organisation. My aim is for my research is to provide a platform where participant practitioners' voices can be listened to and heard, rather than dismissed and marginalised (Gordon, 2018; Astvik, Welander & Hellgren, 2021; Amas and Fox, 2023) and through this there is a potential for them to be the voices of the profession.

1.7 Aims of the Research Study

The research study set out to examine the unique perspectives of social worker practitioners undertaking continuing professional development (CPD) in a work context where they were expected to meet their regulatory obligations (Social Work England, (SWE), 2019), as well as their personal development and career aspirations.

The study set out to explore with individual social workers their understanding of CPD, how they negotiate this alongside work-related tasks and personal demands.

For instance, casework to meet service users' unique, diverse, needs, their individual learning and developmental needs, their personal motivation and career aspirations. I wanted to explore what they perceive as the facilitators and enablers that help them mediate and navigate CPD successfully, as well as the barriers and challenges to participation amidst the ever-changing and increasing complexity and challenges of the landscape in which they practise (Payne, 2008; Nissen, Pendell, Jivanjee, and Goodluck, 2014; Tempo and Oltedal, 2021). Furthermore, there is the tension of working in a neoliberal climate that thrusts responsibility onto individual social workers for their development (HCPC, 2012; BASW, 2013; SWE, 2019) albeit with some organisational assistance.

1.8 Research Questions

The key research question of this study is as follows:

How do Social Workers navigate Continuing Professional Development to sustain and develop their practice and professional identity?

The subordinate research questions are as follows:

1. What do social workers understand by CPD?
2. Why do social workers do CPD?
3. What are the perceived facilitators and barriers to CPD?

1.9 Research Methodology

The research sits within an interpretivist paradigm, using semi-structured narrative interviews that capture the 'voices and lived experiences' of participants' to understand their perspectives and views. I recruited twenty-one diverse experienced social work practitioner participants at various stages in their careers who were in various roles and social work settings via open flyer and snowball techniques (Coleman,1958; Goodman, 1961). As the data were collected during the Covid 19 Pandemic virtual on-line semi-structured narrative interviews were used. Eighteen of the participants worked across six different local authorities in rural and urban settings. Of the three other participants, one was employed in a private hospital, and two were independent practitioners with had portfolios of roles in practice, education, training, and social work consultancy.

Data analysis used reflexive thematic analysis, interrogating the data using social science commentators, Mills (1959), Freire (1970), Fromm (1976), and Foucault (1977), their stances and themes that connect to contemporary social work practice and continuing professional development.

Thematic analysis of qualitative data was used applying Braun and Clarke (2006; 2013; 2022) six-phase-guide for thematic analysis. This enabled me to generate codes and themes and link these to the Thematic Framework influential philosophical commentators, Mills (1959), Freire (1970), Fromm (1976) and Foucault (1977), and their perspectives, as well as social work theory and research.

1.10 Contribution to Knowledge

This small-scale empirical research study offers a unique contribution to the knowledge base of social work continuing professional development by drawing on the extensive data, illustrated in the participants' narratives, which emphasise their perspectives and lived experiences, and facilitators and enablers that are supportive to undertaking CPD. Conversely, participants also exemplified the obstacles and barriers that affect their capacity to wholeheartedly participate in CPD to develop themselves and practice. Additionally, the research data highlighted that many participants have career aspirations to move on to achieve expertism in their role, qualify in a specialism, or attain higher formal qualifications (as recommended by Croisdale-Appleby, 2014). However, these are currently denied to them due to structural factors, such as lack of dedicated study time, career planning entitlement, and importantly an absence of funding to achieve opportunities.

1.11 Overview of Thesis Structure

The first chapter introduces the background to the study and sets it in context in terms of rationale, choice of topic and questions, selection of research design, methodology, data collection, analysis and briefly highlights how the research findings have contributed to knowledge.

Chapter two outlines the literature strategy followed by the literature review. This section firstly gives an historical timeline relating to the formation of social work as a

professional task and the values, ethics, and aspirations on which it was built. Secondly, it covers the historical policy context of social work education and training, and, thirdly, followed by the shifts and changes of governments from various political ideologies that influenced the introduction of social work becoming a regulatory profession. Finally, it outlines the development the policies and developments imposed on the social work profession, including the requirement to undertake and evidence continuing professional development annually in order to practise.

Chapter three introduces the Theoretical Framework for the study, drawing primarily on the work of Mills (1959), Freire (1970, Fromm (1976), and Foucault (1977), philosophical social commentators and their stances.

Chapter Four covers Research Design and Methodology. This includes discussion around Ethics, Ontological and Epistemological Positions; Research Data Collection Methods; Selection of Participants, sample size; participant characteristics, data collection and transcription of data with chapter summary.

Chapters five, six, seven and eight present the research findings and discussion, an integrated approach. Each separate section discusses a specific themes and sub-themes, interpreting these and linking these to the Theoretical Framework, social work theory and research, and other relevant contemporary social issues literature.

Chapter nine sets out the conclusion of the empirical research study relating to the interviews with twenty-one qualified social workers on *How do Social Workers navigate Continuing Professional Development to sustain and develop their practice and professional identity?* The section covers a summary of findings, the importance of the research in relation to the 'voice of the social worker', Strengths and Limitations of the research; The Research Contribution to Knowledge, Recommendations, Researcher's Reflections and Concluding Remarks.

1.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the topic, research questions, aspects of methodology and overall structure of the thesis.

The following chapter will discuss relevant literature, setting the scene for the original research study that is explained and discussed across the thesis.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to Literature Review

This chapter explains the literature search that formed the basis for the research to answer the central question *"How do Social Workers navigate Continuing Professional Development to sustain and develop their practice and professional identity?"* The initial section sets out the strategy approach adopted for identifying relevant literature across the different areas covered in the review. Initially this sets the research topic in context by tracing some of the significant historical events and influences that have contributed to the emergence of social work as a profession. There will be a brief further discussion on social work, roles and tasks and emergence of continuing professional development. The chapter will then review how social work has been shaped and increasingly developed by the ideological positions of governments of different political persuasion in terms of the social work practice and policies and legislative framework that has led to increased control and loss of autonomy over practice issues (Edwards, Hallett, and Sawbridge, 2008; Doel, 2012; Karvinen-Niinikoski, Beddoe, Ruch, and Tsui, 2019; Rogowski, 2020) and primarily in the UK as a state activity (Warner, 2021).

2.1.1 Literature Search Strategy

Prior to exploring the literature related to this area of research, this section outlines the approach taken to searching for and identifying relevant literature.

As I had a long-term interest in CPD I had some knowledge of the research in this field. On starting my doctoral research, I initially attended several workshops organised by the Brunel University post-graduate development specialist subject librarian. Through this I gained up-to-date knowledge on literature searching that included ideas and tips on different processes to enable me to be systematic in my approach. When I commenced my doctoral studies, I undertook an initial search on the literature review and revisited it periodically to ensure I drew on current research and included any new areas. The searches used a variety of different search engines, library catalogues, and electronic databases. For example, Boolean search, a search engine with techniques to refine and focus my search using keywords with operators

(AND, OR NOT); Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC); Google Scholar; Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA); Web of Science.

The databases also have provision for searches by criteria such as date timeframe, language, country, publications, that included, journal articles, books, newspapers, or theses. One of the advantages of using databases through the university library was access to full text of research articles from well-known relevant journals and respected authors. For example, British Social Work Journal, Social Work Education, Journal of Teaching in Social Work, Practice, which covered articles relating to my research topic. I also signed up for different publishers' website alerts, e.g. ResearchGate, Sage Publications, Routledge, Academia, SCIE., that increased access to relevant articles. The articles were either open access or access gained through the university library to download copies and save, a benefit when working as a lone researcher at a distance from the university library.

I evaluated each piece of research using criteria, for instance, checking the article was within the timeframe of roughly twenty-five years, except for historical accounts of the development of social work and seminal pieces of research pertinent to the discussions. My practice was to read the research abstract to gauge its relevance to my topic, ensuring it was a qualitative piece of research that met the required research standards, was primary research and peer reviewed. Additionally, I also undertook hand searches of specific social work practice journal articles to ensure wide coverage of articles.

My initially focus for the literature searches centred on the timeline of history social work development, followed by social work definitions, roles, and tasks before moving on to continuing professional development. Over the years CPD in social work has used a variety of interchangeable terms, such as *continuing professional development, professional development, professional learning; post-qualifying learning in social work; work-based learning; and life-long learning.* A further literature search was undertaken to develop the theoretical framework on the research topic and relationship between the selected theorists, Mills (1959), Freire (1970), Fromm (1976), and Foucault (1977).

Additional searches were undertaken to formulate the specific areas of the methodology chapter, as well as searches in relation to social policy, practice-related documents, legislation, and new initiatives/models of practice brought in by government departments. These included reviewing historical and contemporary documents to inform and put my research in context, drawing from a variety of sources, for example British Association of Social Workers (BASW); Department of Education (DfE); Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC); Local Government Association (LGA); Social Care Institute Excellence (SCIE);Social Work England (SWE) and previous regulators (GSCC; HCPC), as well as a selection of documents from the other three UK countries, and Republic of Ireland. The searches enabled me to widen and build on my knowledge, as well as keep up to date with new research and changes in practice. Appendix 1 (p.321) provides and overview of the approach used for the searches and selection of material used to complete this thesis.

2.2 Setting the Scene for Social Work Development

2.2.1 Historical Overview

Historical documents and accounts (Moulin, 1978, Pierson, 2011; Bamford, 2015) indicate long-standing concerns about the plight of some members of society who have been deprived, disadvantaged, disabled, physically ill and/or marginalised, recognising that some individuals required external assistance to cope with their various social problems (Almshouse Association, n.d.). Over the ages, destitution and individual need in England were primarily met by the church, benevolent institutions, endowed hospitals, as well as more often by the landed gentry, who also wielded control and power over citizens (Horner, 2012). The Poor Law, dating back to 1601, established a formalized system for dispensing ‘outdoor’ assistance to those in need in the community, which became a parish responsibility, payable by middle and upper class through local taxes (Horner, 2012). Alongside ‘outdoor relief’ were Workhouses that had a history of formal recognition going back to the seventeenth century though there were several institutions for elderly and sick that predated this time (Pierson, 2011; Bamford, 2015).

Britain was the first country to industrialise that led to mass migration from the rural countryside to the cities to find work (Young and Ashton,1956; Hobsbawm, 1961;

Pierson, 2011; Bamford, 2015).This culminated in many poor families facing crises especially a combination of new social problems, such as lack of housing, sanitation, ill-health due to epidemics, children being used as child labour, with no infrastructure, or resources in place to address these issues (Pierson, 2011; Horner, 2012; Bamford, 2015).

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, administered by the Poor Law Commission (1887), was brought in as a response to the view that Poor Relief was being abused. It focused on the most disadvantaged, attempting to alleviate poverty and destitution within the community by providing "outdoor relief" (Gash, 1973), but resulted in "creating social stigma and stigma of pauperism" (Pierson, 2011, p.8). Alongside this provision Workhouses were encouraged not to provide relief for those individuals who did not enter the workhouse. Workhouse policy was to separated men and women. Children were permitted to initially remain with their mothers but when over two, could also be separated from their parents and siblings and sent to orphanages or industrial schools. These institutions were run within a disciplinary framework, where individuals were expected to work in harsh and cruel conditions, sometimes under the control of unscrupulous characters (Pierson, 2011; Bamford, 2015; Brain, 2019). Alongside the above developments during the first half of the nineteenth century a number of philanthropic organisations were set up in areas, for example Glasgow, Birmingham, Liverpool, which were run by volunteers. Their prime objective was alleviating poverty by addressing the plight of individuals who were affected by the industrial revolution through unemployment, injured, disabled, or destitution (Pierson, 2011, Horner, 2012; Bamford, 2015). Additionally, a considerable number of charities, trade unions and friendly societies were active in various communities in various parts of the county (Pierson, 2011; Horner, 2012; Bamford, 2015).

The Foundling Hospital had been founded in 1739 by Thomas Coram in London but as social problems became more pronounced and recognised in the latter stage of the 19th century, for instance, child neglect, poverty, alcoholism, homelessness, pauperism, and vagrancy, philanthropists established a number of charities. These included, for instance, Salvation Army, 1865; Dr. Barnardo's,1870; Children of England Central Home for Waifs and Strays, 1881; The London Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children, 1884. Alongside these organisations in the mid-19th

century was the development of asylums for citizens who had been diagnosed under the Lunacy Act 1845 with mental health or learning disabilities issues. These organisations responded to the crises inherent at that time and worked alongside State provision (e.g., Poor Law) (Pierson, 2011; Horner, 2012; Doel, 2012; Bamford, 2015). It is notably that most of these organisations continue to operate in current times, some with updated titles (Skinner and Thomas, 2017).

2.2.2 Emergence of The Charity Organisation Society

The most prominent early social work organisation in England, the Charity Organisation Society (COS) was formed in 1869 (originally named Society for Organising Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendacity, Pierson, 2011; Bamford, 2015), as a practical solution to deal with emerging social problems (Pierson, 2011). The COS is considered the forerunner on which the foundations of social work were built as a career/profession (Rogowski, 2010, 2020; Pierson, 2011; Bamford, 2015). It became influential, particularly with philanthropists and in government circles, as well as development in the United States (Payne, 2006; Pierson, 2011).The COS was originally set up with the task of coordinating the role of a considerable number of charities in existence that were alleviating poverty and "*deserving"* (my emphasis) applicants to the most appropriate agency (Pierson, 2011; Horner, 2012; Bamford, 2015). It supported the view of self-help, though was moralistic (Pierson, 2011; Horner, 2012; Bamford, 2015) and gendered (Skinner and Thomas, 2017) in its view was that many of the individuals "were trying to escape their responsibilities, in which case providing any relief would only further encourage this" (Pierson, 2011, p.20).The individual characteristics of the applicants were emphasised by one of the philanthropic founders, Helen Bosanquet, who saw them as pivotal to "shaping life changes" (Bosanquet, 1903 cited in Pierson, 2011, p.21). The organisation was predicated on a "moral approach," emphasising self-help and self-improvement, discouraging "begging and indiscriminate alms giving" (Bamford, 2015, p.7). These "values" were reinforced as a key factor for volunteers to consider and assess when working with applicants.

Reviewing the COS objectives, it is notable that they set frameworks for practice that continued to influence social work practice today. For instance, home visits, where a

biographical and family assessment is conducted, including the family's past issues, assessment of community resources and focus on capacity for change. The COS had many strengths, particularly its "systematic approach to dispensing charity, its administrative systems and record keeping, its organisation" (Bamford, 2015, p.7). Additionally, its volunteers were provided with training to undertake interventions, casework, with a measure of success (Pierson, 2011; Horner, 2012; Bamford, 2015). Despite this the COS received criticism about the philosophical and moralistic attitude it took, as well as some of its approaches, particularly its investigatory approach to other charities that did not operate similarly (Pierson, 2011; Horner, 2012; Bamford, 2015). The approach of assessment, social casework, and influence of Mary Richmond's publication of Social Diagnosis (1917) established social work with its own what Pierson (2011) describes as "meticulous, common practice that would be regarded as social work's own sphere of activity" (p.62). Another objective was to gain recognition of social work, similar to the medical profession. These early practice systems continue to be principle social work tasks that underpin contemporary social work practice.

Alongside the COS, other community-based organisations were developing which had a different philosophical outlook and view of individuals. These included the Guilds of Help in the north of England (Moore, 1977), who took a different perspective and did not see the individual as responsible for their poverty, but more an outcome of the economic situation in which individuals were placed. They were one of the first agencies to work in collaboration with other agencies, such as schools, criminal justice system, and Poor Law to address issues (Moore, 1977; Pierson, 2011; Bamford, 2015). Another significant development was the influence of "reforming pioneers" (Doel, 2012, p.12), such as Samuel and Henrietta Barnett, in establishing the Settlements in 1884, for example Toynbee Hall (1895), which led to others springing up in various parts of the country, particularly university towns. These community-based organisations provided aid to alleviate poverty but also provided opportunities for individuals to improve their personal circumstances through training and education, providing a range of services, that focused on the client's need and situation (Young and Ashton, 1956), an approach pioneered by Barnett (n.d., cited in Pierson, 2011; Doel, 2012; Bamford, 2015).

Towards the end of the nineteen century and into the early twentieth century, the innovative surveys of Booth (1903) and Rowntree (1901) captured the lives of citizens showing “that one third of urban population in Britain struggled with poverty” (Pierson, 2011, p.36). However, there were differing political and social attitudes of poverty, its causes and effect. Dissent and conflict became apparent between those who were founding members and heavily involved with the COS, such as Charles Loch, Helen Bosanquet, who opposed state intervention, prompting aspects such as self-help, community education to achieve self-reliance whereas Octavia Hill, and Fabians, such as Sydney and Beatrice Webb saw state intervention, with individual rights and conditions as a way of addressing some of societies’ “social-ills” (Pierson, 2011, Horner, 2012; Rogowski, 2020). Additionally, the COS saw it important to develop friendships, treat individuals as equals, not be patronising (Rogowski, 2020) with these attitudes also being emphasised by the Barnetts in their work in the Settlements.

In the first twenty years of the 20th century there was a shift from ‘charity work’ towards ‘social work’ although there was a struggle to formulate a clear view of what social work encapsulated and should be included in its definition (Payne, 2006). Social work was influenced by the political climate which shifted post first world war opinion to the right (Pierson, 2011) but also saw a rise of demand for a welfare state to care for the war-wounded and build a fairer society for all (Attlee, 1920; Pierson, 2011; Bamford, 2015).

Within the UK the first social work text was written by Clement Attlee (1920), who also edited a series of social work titles (Doel, 2012) and later became a UK Labour Prime Minister in 1945. He was responsible for bringing in the post-World War Two National Health Act (1946), implemented in 1948, and welfare state. Attlee had become involved in social work initially through his part-time work in youth clubs, and settlement movement (Payne, 2006; Pierson, 2011; Bamford, 2015), before progressing to become the first social work lecturer pre first World War at the London School of Economics. Attlee saw “social service as the right and duty of a citizen and emphasised the breadth of the idea of social work, although as a profession it had a narrower interpretation” (cited in Payne, 2006, p.32). Attlee brought a class-based analysis to the profession, acknowledging that, “formerly social work was done *for,* now *with* the working class” (Attlee, 1920, p.19). Attlee’s views were a shift away from

the paternalism that permeated much of the charity work that was being dispensed to those in need. His views evidence a value-based approach to his work, viewing individuals as fellow citizens, highlighting the importance of the need to work in partnership, which is a similar tenet of social work today. Working in partnership and valuing the service users' point of view should be central to practice, a requirement that is built into the standards of social work (SWE, 2019). Attlee, importantly, considered it essential for individuals to gain control over their own lives by enhancing their knowledge and skills to become more self-determining and does not see the role as creating dependency. This is a central feature of social work practice today, it is rooted in ethics and values (Biestek, 1961; Banks, 1995, 2012; Parrott, 2006, 2014; GSCC, 2002; HCPC, 2012; BASW, 2014, 2021; SWE, 2019).

2.2.3 Pioneers' Influence on the Evolution of Social Work

Towards the end of the nineteenth century and moving onto the early twentieth century evidence indicates that social work was moving from voluntary status to more formalised occupation which was supported by social reformers and philanthropists (Lyons, 1999; Rogowski, 2010, 2020; Pierson, 2011; Horner, 2012; Bamford, 2015).

Research indicates as early as 1893 the COS had paid volunteers and a scheme in place for social work lectures on theory and practice for volunteers, influenced by Octavia Hill and Margaret Sewell, both advocates and supporters of COS (Lyons, 1999; Rogowski, 2010, 2020; Pierson, 2011; Horner, 2012; Bamford, 2015). Along with the Women's University Settlement and National Union of Women Workers it set up a series of social work lecturers where they explored issues, such as the Poor Law, dispensing charity, and almsgiving. Trained workers became in demand by various emerging charities, with the first paid hospital almoner, Mary Stewart appointed to the Royal Free Hospital in 1895 (Baraclough, 2004; Pierson, 2011; Horner, 2012; Bamford, 2015).

Many of the early volunteers were from Christian or wealthy backgrounds (Jennings, 1930 cited in Pierson, 2011; Horner, 2012; Bamford, 2015). There was a drive to shift from a voluntary, amateur task to standardised methods of interventions to become more professionalised (Jones,C.,1976; Macdonald, 1995, Pierson, 2011; Horner,

2012; Bamford, 2015) that included a shift by 1893 of the COS having paid workers to advise and train volunteers (Bamford, 2015). According to Jones, C., (1996), a driving force at the beginning of the twentieth century was to development formal social work education programme. However, the desire was “to carefully constructed education programme, rather than an apprenticeship training regime that was essential if field workers were going to cope with the pressures of the job and be immunised from disillusionment or even radical contamination” (pp. 191-192). At that time there was a desire to prevent “social workers from being radicalised or demoralised” (Jones, C.,1996, p.191). Through the COS’s influence in 1903 it set up the Sociology and Social Economics foundation in London and the School of Social Science at Liverpool University. Both courses covered theoretical and practical knowledge required of the role (Smith, 1965; Lyons, 1999; Pierson, 2011; Doel, 2012; Bamford, 2015). In 1912 the School of Sociology was taken over by London School of Economics (LSE) leading to the formation of other courses, such as Barnett House, Oxford, Bedford College, London, Birmingham University, Liverpool University, as well as Dublin and USA, all of whom over time have played an influential role in social work education and research (Lyons, 1999; Pierson, 2011; Doel, 2012; Bamford, 2015).

However, there were growing doubts about the precise role of the universities and the development of the training schemes that led to the formation of Joint Universities Council (JUC) for Social Studies in 1918. This remained in place until 1950 when it developed into the Social Work Education Committee to provide a vehicle of communication between the universities and the various bodies responsible for specialist training, as well as the Ministry of Health and Home Office. At that time, both employed social workers in Childcare, Mental Health, and Welfare, as well as Probation Officers working in the criminal justice field. Of note, by the 1930s the Home Office had established training courses (NAPO, 1995), which remained in place, with only minor amendments from the 1940s until 1997, when there was a radical political intervention by the Conservative Government that “forcibly split” (Doel, 2012, p.148) the separation of probation and social work training (Bamford, 2015).

In terms of continuity in social work, since the development of charities and establishment of COS women have played a prominent role as volunteers, as well as in paid positions. They played a significant role in work with children, families, the elderly, and hospital work, (Walton, 1975; Rogowski, 2010, 2020; Horner, 2012; Bamford, 2015), and when available took up training predominantly in these roles. Of note men largely worked in the areas of 'control,' such as Probation and Mental Welfare, and NSPCC. These gendered choices mirrored domestic roles within Victorian society, as well as societal positions prevalent at that time (Walton, 1975; Rogowski, 2010, 2020; Horner, 2012; Bamford, 2015). Whilst workforce information indicates that there is now more diversity in specific social work and allied roles (e.g. child protection; mental health; probation), the social work trend has been consistent in attracting more females into the profession. Social work data in November 2024 indicated the social work workforce was represented by 83% females and 17% males (SWE, 2024), and, as later research data relating to participants will indicate fourteen (67%) were female and seven (33%) males, broadly mirroring the gendered historical pattern.

2.2.4 Section Summary

In summary, the above section provides a brief timeline of the journey of the development of social work. It highlights some of the significant stages of travel, shifts, changes, developmental responses of governments to the plight of citizens at various stages in their lives when they have been affected by political, economic, and personal troubles. Governmental responses were largely paternalistic, tinged with harshness, conditionality, and left many citizens in destitution. However, through the awareness and response of concerned philanthropic altruistic citizens and citizen volunteers, innovative schemes were devised to respond and address these hardships. This culminated in the seeds that lead to the development of social work, initially in voluntary capacity but moving forward through various sequences in the twentieth century to the establishment of social work as a profession. The next sections will focus on the various governmental policies and legislation that have been instrumental to formalising social work as a profession and increasingly a state activity.

2.3 Post Second World War II Development in Social Work Education and Training - 1945 to 1968

A pivotal point in the development of more formalised social services and social work was the evacuation of more than one million children during the Second World War to foster families that led to increased public awareness that many children were living in poverty, deprivation and were malnourished (Pierson, 2011).This was not a new factor, as it had been highlighted with the introduction of primary education for all children (Education Act 1870). At that time, several local authorities (e.g. London County Council, 1889) attempted to address these concerns by setting up Voluntary Care Committees. Volunteers undertook home visits in partnership with COS volunteers and NSPCC child protection workers, with the objective of improving the children's circumstances and health (Pierson, 2011; Rogowski, 2020).

An important landmark in social work policy, and underpinning Child legislation in particular, occurred following the death of Dennis O'Neill in 1945 from neglect and abuse by his foster parents (Monckton Report, 1945), that led to the Curtis Committee Official Inquiry (1946).This revealed the low standards, harsh condition, fragmented services of public and voluntary care, as well as inadequate supervision of foster carers by Poor Law Officers (Curtis Report, 1946; Pierson, 2011, Bamford, 2015). There was a recognition by government and public that more formalised measures needed to be put in place (e.g., Beveridge Report, 1942). The Curtis Inquiry (1946) led to establishment of one-year childcare course commencing in 1947, sponsored and financed by the Home Office that led to the Home Office Letter of Recognition in Child Care (Horner, 2012; Bamford and Bilton, 2020; Rogowski, 2020), subsequently enshrining roles and statutory duties of social work into the Children Act of 1948. This promoted a shift to professionalisation and expertism of the role social work with qualified children's officers, social work training, and expectation of individuals able to undertake "skilled casework" (Pierson, 2011, p.166; Bamford, 2015; Rogowski, 2020) to work with families. Alongside the legislative framework for children and families, the National Assistance Act 1948 provided a range of services for adults that underpinned social care and support, whereas Mental Health Welfare Officers were employed under the National Health Service (NHS) Act 1946. There followed a plethora of different legislation spanning the next seventy years to address various

aspects of adult need that were largely incorporated into the Care Act 2014 (DH, 2014).

2.3.1 Influence of Younghusband Reports

An authoritative advocate for social work development, Eileen Younghusband, produced the first Younghusband Report (1947) that highlighted growing professional concerns about social work training being offered by the Universities and professional training bodies, describing the landscape as “somewhat chaotic”. Her review indicated that university social science courses were “of good academic standing, but weak on the practical side” (p.2). In her later report (1951) it was noted professional courses emphasised practical experience but made no significant contribution to the general body of knowledge nor did they “continue the students’ education in basic principles” (Younghusband, 1951, para. 195; Hartsthorn, 1982, cited in Pierce and Weinstein, 2000, p.4). The location of social work education was not an agreed path, and to accommodate these criticisms. Younghusband recommended that the curriculum should be as wide as possible to cater for a variety of individuals issues and problems (Pierson, 2011). Furthermore, Younghusband (1951) maintained “that the removal of social work education from the university sector would lower the standards and status of courses” (Younghusband, 1951, p.172). At that stage there was a debate around whether social work training should be specialist or generic (Payne, 1996; Lyons, 1999; Bamford, 2015) and whilst specialist training was seen as important, the decision was for core generic courses to be developed. Younghusband’s views was largely supported by the Seebohm Report (1968) (Bamford, 2020). Subsequently the first course was set up by the London School of Economics (LSE) in 1954, which was also the trend internationally (Bamford, 2015). Coordination of services, amalgamation of the different departments and better trained social workers were identified as key requirements that needed to be addressed.

2.4 Development of Regulatory Framework for Social Work

2.4.1 Establishment of Social Work Educational Organisations

An important development in terms of social work was the establishment of the National Institute of Social Work (NISW) in 1961 to promote social work education

practice and management funded by Nuffield Foundation and Rowntree Trust (The National Archives, n.d.). It was a pioneering and influential organisation in the field of practice that provided an array of excellent courses (Rogowski, 2020; Beresford and Croft, 2020; Jones, D., 2020). It was merged into the Social Care Institute for Excellence in 2003 (SCIE, 2003) following statutory regulation of social workers in 2001.

In 1962 the Council for Training in Social Work was established under the Health Visiting and Social Work Training Act (1962), with a remit to promote and attract persons into social work, as well as secure approval for suitable generic courses for them to provide social work education and training. This resulted in an expansion of courses at universities and colleges of further education that facilitated training for probation officers, childcare and health and welfare that were publicly funded (Jones, R., 2020).

The Seebohm Report published in 1968, as well as previously the Kilbrandon Report in Scotland in 1964, were important landmarks for social work that paved the way for the establishment of local authority Social Service Departments (SSDs) in England and Wales. The belief was that this would help unify the fragmented services (Pierson, 2011; Horner, 2012) and strengthen the role and identify of social workers in England and Wales. Scotland took a quite different approach from England and Wales, especially towards children, introducing Children's Hearings to cater for children at risk or neglect and children at risk of offending, forming a unified service with the objective of decriminalising children (Whyte, 2014).

On 1st October 1971, the Central Council for Education and Training of Social Workers (CCETSW) was established under the Health Visiting and Social Work (Training) Act 1962, replacing six separate training councils, including the Council for Social Work. This was a United Kingdom (UK) wide independent regulatory body, with one of its remits to promote social work education and training (Rogowski, 2020). However, many social work commentators were critical that increasingly it became subject to government influence and control (Bilton, 2020 cited in Bamford and Bilton, 2020).

The Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) was introduced in 1971 providing several different routes to attain the award. For instance, a one-year post-graduate course for graduates with relevant degrees, or two years for non-graduate; a four-year undergraduate programme incorporating a CQSW. Additionally, a post-graduate CQSW at master's level focusing primarily on statutory social work, either in the community, an organisation, or for example general or psychiatric hospital or clinic. The two-year CQSW was a course for mature individuals, fully funded by the government. Whilst these routes led to an increase in qualified social workers in local authorities, only around forty percent of staff were qualified, mostly working in "field work" (Lyons, 1999) and not across the different departmental positions.

In 1976, CCETSW approved the Certificate in Social Services (CSS), a two-year in-service training based on education and training programme which was aimed at those who worked in residential day care and community work. This latter model relied on co-operation between agencies, educational institutions, and students. The programme proved popular from the student's perspective as they benefitted from a work-based route and receiving a salary whilst they trained. The employers, who were involved in the design of the programme, considered that this allied with those of the organisation as a management module was incorporated into the programme.

2.4.2 Influence of Conservative Administrations 1979 to 1997

The election of a Conservative government in 1979 shifted the agenda in terms of the public sector and welfare services, as the country was still recovering from the world economic crisis of 1973 relating to oil prices that had affected the country economically (Timmis, 1996; Jones, R.,2020; Rogowski, 2020). The agenda was based on neoliberal principles that brought in a range of changes across the social work profession, including new public management, with challenges and changes to practice in adult services and children and families' services. For instance, competitive tendering, purchaser-provider split, care management, child protection, changes to criminal justice for both young offenders and adults, as well as mass unemployment, poverty and social exclusion (Lymbery, 2001; Pierson, 2011; Rogowski, 2020).These influences affected the shape of social work programmes with a move away from radical critiques, such as class, poverty, inequality, racism, feminism, and disability(e.g. Bailey and Brake,1975). These were replaced by

research and teaching about developments in the field, for instances, community work and casework (Brown, Hadley and White, 1982; Hadley and McGrath, 1984, cited in Lyons, 1999) as well as focusing on child abuse factors and safeguarding issues that had been highlighted in a series of critical inquiries into childcare practices (Howe, 1986; Stevenson, 1989, cited in Lyons, 1999; Laming, 2003;2009; Blom-Cooper, 1984; Butler-Sloss, 1988; Rogowski, 2010; 2020; Jones, R., 2014; 2020; Bamford, 2015).These led to changes focusing on individual solutions, targets, more surveillance, less worker autonomy, de-professionalism, and more surveillance for service users (Thompson, 2005; Parton, 2011). Langan (1993) saw this period as the fall of social work and its loss of credibility.

CCETSW had earlier recommended that there should be a shift to a three-year training programme to bring the UK in line with Europe and European Union we had joined in 1973, especially as there was concern as Britain's academic entry qualifications and professional training were lower than Europe, but the British government declined to support this or fund this (Lyons, 1999). This led to divisiveness and acrimonious debate within social work (Bamford,1984; Jones, D., 2020), with Henke (1988) considering this was due to the extensive public expenditure it would require. Whilst others, such as Parsloe (1990), saw this as "a blow to the standing of British social work and social work education" (p.20). Social work educators were in favour of the longer training period, and this affected social work morale. Some writers saw it as a way of weakening a professional group that the government saw as challenging and who also did not have the support of the public (Lyons, 1999; Jones, D., 2020).

The CQSW (1971) qualification remained in place until 1989 when CCETSW outlined proposals in Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) Paper 30, that embodied many of the key features of the Qualifying Diploma in Social Work (QDSW), which had been proposed previously. The introduction of DipSW in 1989 merged the CQSW and CSS into one qualification (Horner, 2012; Bamford, 2015, Tompsett, 2020). However, there remained concern that retaining a non-graduate qualification would put UK social workers at a disadvantage in comparison to those qualifying abroad (Cannan, Berry, and Lyons, 1992), as well as other professionals with whom social workers

worked alongside, such as teachers, psychologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, nurses, and medical practitioners.

DipSW was a generic qualification that had specialised pathways, e.g., Children and Families, Adult, and Probation. The practice assessment was based on six prescribed core competencies with an emphasis on work-based learning (WBL). Many academics were opposed this approach, with Garrett (2010) referring to it as a "functional competencies approach to learning" (p.349), others highlighted the danger of using this type of model for social work (Preston-Shoot, 2004; Cooper, 2008). Overall, there was opposition to the competency based 'tick box' approach to assessing complex social work problems and interventions. Dominelli (1996) commented that the introduction of "Competencies represent the Taylorisation of professional tasks", seeing this as contributing to the "Deprofessionalisation of social work", with "increased management control" (p.163). Dominelli (2007) later argued that the shift to neoliberal and managerialist priorities increasingly shaped social work education. This point was further supported by Lymbery (2003), who was critical of this being a feature of DipSW assessment. Over time concern has been raised about increased political and government interference in social work education, with particular emphasis on its commitment to increasing employer and business representation and overall, its influence (Rogowski, 2013; Jones, R., 2014, 2019; McCulloch, 2018; Hanley, 2021). Moreover, Rogowski (2020) saw this as social workers being "regulated and shaped social work education in the interests of employers who wanted social workers to 'do' rather than think" (p.96).

In 1993, the Department of Health (DoH) funded a major research study by Marsh and Triseliotis on social workers' readiness to practice on completion of prequalifying programmes. This found that many post-qualifying students experienced anxiety about their new roles and positions and were affected by bureaucracy, lack of resources, supervision and support. Later research by Sharpe, Moriarty, Manthorpe, Stevens and Hussein (2011) also finding that anxiety was a common factor whereas Bates, Immins, Parker, Keen, Rutter, Brown and Zsigo, (2010) found post-qualifying students were only moderately equipped to undertake various roles.

However, before Marsh and Triseliotis' research could be develop, prematurely, in 1994, Bottomley announced a review and new DipSW requirements (Thompsett, 2020). This qualification included National Occupational Standards that brought together a professional, academic, and vocational framework and remained a two-year programme at higher educational level. There was criticism by leading academics (e.g., Lishman, 1995; Clarke, 1995; Dominelli, 1996; Ward, 1996; Adams, 1997) who considered the "competence' approach" as a down grade of the education standards and, also, it dictated to academics the approach they should follow.

2.5 Introduction of Regulatory Context for Social Workers

2.5.1 Labour Government Administration – 1997 - 2010

The New Labour government were elected in 1997, with a manifesto commitment to create a social care regulator (Bamford and Bilton, 2020). An important phase in social work education was the publication of the White Paper *Modernising Social Services* (Department of Health 1998b), which led to Government initiating a major transformation in this sphere, as well as significant social policy developments alongside inspection and regulation (Lymbery, 2004a; Horner, 2012; Jones, D., 2020; Rogowski, 2020).The Government brought in legislation that established the Care Standards Act 2000. Its remit was to offer greater protection to service users, carers, and the general public by regulating the social care workforce by ensuring that there was high-quality practice within the social care sector.

The act also made provision for the title of "social worker" to be a "protected title" that came into force in England and Wales on 1st April 2005 (Social Work Regulations, 2005).To practise using the title of social worker required social workers to register with the nominated organisation for their region in UK and abide by standards, codes, and regulations (GSCC, 2002).

The act also abolished CCETSW, one of the recommendations from Lord Laming Public Inquiry (2001). The UK was split into four regions (nations that made up UK) and all its functions were transferred to these organisations: The General Social Care Council (GSCC), for England; The Care Council for Wales (CCW); The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC), that had UK wide codes of practice for employers and social care workers (Office for

Public Management, 2000; GSCC, 2002) which all regions endorsed (Bamford and Bilton, 2020).

2.5.2 General Social Care Council

Set up in 2001 the GSCC was a non-governmental department of the Department of Health (DoH) who became the first social worker regulator in United Kingdom, with a remit to improve the quality of social care services for the benefit of people who use services. The three main functions were:1) 'Issue and distribute codes of practice for social care workers and their employers: 2) Maintain the register of social workers and 3) Regulation of social work education and training' (GSCC, 2001).

The GSCC became responsible for coordination of the National Occupational Standards (NOSs), a framework for practice that was implemented across the four nations (TOPPS, 2002; GSCC, 2002).The standards were developed through consultation with social work practitioners, employers, and service users with the aim of providing a "benchmark of 'best practice' in social work competence across the UK" (Rogowski, 2020, p.101).

There was considerable criticism of the shift and appropriateness of using this approach, particularly to cope with the complexity of work and the changing nature of the task of social work. This provoked passionate debate and polarisation of views and, in some settings, a single issue, which served to differentiate those who were in favour and those who were not (Dominelli, 2000), although Yelloly (1995) writing earlier had pointed out that one of the advantages of a competency-based model was that it provided a comprehensive framework for a progressive system of education, as well as a means of comparing levels across a range of occupations. Earlier authors, such as Moonie (1993) and Winter (1991) pointed out that the approach increased access to educational opportunity, with Moonie (1993) also highlighting the value of supportive learner-led approaches. Schön (1992) also noted that the approach identified clear *'goalposts',* and this reduced the focus on personal qualities, making performance more visible.

2.5.3 GSCC Continuing Professional Development Requirements

To continue to register, social workers had to evidence their post-registration training and learning (PRTL). There was a requirement that, in order to re-register, social workers had to evidence that they had undertaken a minimum of fifteen days (90 hours) of post-qualifying training over a three-year period (GSCC 2003 amended 2005). This could be through undertaking courses, reading, studying or research. Registrants also had the option of continuing with the Post Qualification in Social Work (PQSW) framework courses (CCETSW,1992) that offered a range of different courses in different pathways at Post-qualifying and Advanced level. These remained in place following GSCC being nominated as regulator, and accessible to social workers. The White Paper had highlighted the need for CPD within the workforce, and to be supported by a strategy to attain this more consistently (Postle, *et al*., 2002).

In 2005 the GSCC introduced their own post-qualifying framework (PQ) in 2007. This had three award levels: Specialist, Higher Specialist, and Advanced, with the framework offering these across five specialisms; mental health, adult social work, practice education, children and families, and leadership and management (GSCC, 2005). Research undertaken by Moriarty and Manthorpe (2014) indicated that there was a lower take up of the awards, than the previous one, though an earlier report by the SWTF indicated possible reasons were “lack of time due to heavy workloads and lack of employer support” (SWTF, 2009, p.38).

2.5.4 Introduction of Degree Social Work Qualification

There continued to be concern by the Government regarding lack of applicants to enter the profession, as well as employers who were concerned that newly qualified social workers were unable to operate effectively in their roles on completion of their courses, with responsibility being focused on educators. Additionally, there continued to be concerns around retention of qualified workers (Rogowski, 2020). To address these issues the Government in 2003 introduced a three-year undergraduate programme as the professional qualifying training for social workers in England (DH, 2003) that would meet European standards (European Economic Community, 1989).There was recognition that to operate in the fast pace, complex world, and diverse human situations that social workers needed to be equipped with developing knowledge and skills to operate efficiently and effectively, with greater accountability

(Hugman, 1991; Horner, 2012).This was a welcome development by social workers, with many commentators, seeing this shift as recognising social work having attained professional status and identity, with its specific codes of ethics, specialist body of knowledge and protected title (Horner, 2012). Access to the degree also reduced the age for eighteen-year-olds to commence their social work training, this was a shift away from previous minimum age requirement of twenty-three to practise. This presents a challenge for social work educators, organisations, students, and service users but also offers an opportunity for providing a creative, learning environment that could lead to potential benefits for organisations, individuals, and social work (Higgs, 2022). Once the degree was in place the DipSW was phased out.

At that time assessment of a student's competence hinged on the National Occupational Standards (NOSs) (TOPPS, 2002). There was criticism of using a competency model across a range of tasks and roles to assess competence. Authors, such as Cooper (2008) were particularly critical of using these in professional education commenting that:

> a functional analysis of concrete, observable tasks and behaviours is simply inappropriate for complex "professional activities" ...it ignores the potential for professional judgement, takes no account of group processes, and has no regard for the influence of social context or setting (Cooper, 2008, p.226).

Furthermore, Cooper (2008) considered that competency-based approach lacked cohesion and integration and did not take account of the complexity of social work professional activities. Another persuasive author, Preston-Shoot (2004) asserted that, in his view, the approach using the NOSs (GSCC, 2002b) was "repetitive, formulaic, reductionist and unrealistic" (p.687). Preston-Shoot (2004) also raised concerns that there was a failure to take account of social work practice and its complexity, with the codes relating to all social care professions, rather than specifically social work, and, lastly, they were professional codes rather than practice. Taylor and Bogo (2014) considered that using the NOSs standards presented a formulaic conceptualisation of the social work profession that was indistinguishable from other types of social care. The NOS standards had six key roles and twenty-one units, each with a descriptor. Each unit had a prescribed, discrete task, which students had to demonstrate. Having been a social work tutor when the NOSs

standards were instituted I agree with the concerns, the standards were confusing, repetitive, and complex for students to gather evidence each standard.

Despite raising the educational standards status for the social work profession social work has continued to be subjected to sustained criticism by the media (e.g., Jones, R., 2014, 2020; Legood, McGrath, Searle, and Lee 2016; Leedham, 2022), particularly when there have been childcare tragedies, specifically following the deaths of two children, Victoria Climbié (2000) and Peter Connelly (2007), with claims that there is low public confidence and trust (Staniforth, Fouche, and Beddoe, 2014; Leigh, 2014; Leedham, 2022; YouGov, 2023). Inquiries ordered by various governments (e.g. Laming Report, 2003, 2009; Haringey Local Safeguarding Board on Baby P., 2009) blamed ineffective social work practice, and lack of partnership working, as contributing to their deaths. These Inquiries have led to direct intervention by central government, sackings of staff, as well as comprehensive reviews of frontline social work with a remit to make recommendations of how these could be reformed and addressed (Munro Review, 2011; Horner, 2012; Jones, R.,2014; Bamford, 2015; Shoesmith, 2016).

Whilst the focus in the media predominantly tends to be on children and family social work practitioners there are tragedies also in adult services in the community. Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHP) act under the Mental Health Act assessing risks to the patient and the community. They are also involved in the Mental Capacity Act, supervision of ex-patients and deal with safeguarding issues. At times there are fatalities that attract media criticism and negativity (e.g. Christopher Clunis Inquiry, 1994).

2.5.5 Social Work Task Force

Following the tragic death of seventeen-month-old Peter Connelly in 2007, (OFSTED, 2008; Haringey, 2008) who had been subjected to extreme neglect and severe abuse by his mother, her boyfriend and lodger (Horner, 2012; Jones, R., 2014, 2020; Bamford, 2015; Rogowski, 2020). the Labour Government responded immediately, setting up an inquiry by Lord Laming (2009). This was the second Inquiry Lord Laming had been involved in relating to Haringey as he had previously undertaken the

Climbié Inquiry (2003). Problems within the social work profession had been recognised by the Labour Government that led them to set up the Social Work Task Force (SWTF) in 2009 (DCSF, 2009) that would review adult and children and family services. A central aim, according to Pierson (2011), was “to increase public awareness of what social work does” (p.159) and setting this out in a “public description” (p.159) of the distinct roles and tasks of social work. The remit set down was “to undertake a comprehensive review of frontline social work practice and to make recommendations for improvement and reform of the whole profession across adult and children’s services” (cited in Bamford, 2015 p.34). Bamford considered that the Social Work Task Force “was given the unenviable task of attempting to bring coherence to education and training and future patterns of careers in social work” (Bamford, 2015, p.84).

The interim report (DCSF, 2009a) was condemnatory about the overall state of social work, highlighting areas of concerns around recruitment, education and training, and the view that students need to be competent and have potential to be research minded in order to deal with the complexity of work and assessment needed to be more robust in its application (Tompsett, 2020). Additionally, concern was raised that there was no single body responsible for representing the profession, with a need for clearer account of how social work effectiveness was measured, as well as a lack of clarity about the distinctiveness of the role of social work (DCSF, 2009a). Their recommendation was that initial social work training was reformed, particularly around consistent entry requirements, teaching, and placement opportunities and, importantly, for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) an assessment and supported year in employment (ASYE). It envisaged that these changes would be supported by career development (SWTF, 2009b). This recommendation, whilst not eventually a statutory requirement for local authorities, led the way to NQSWs having an expectation to on-going support and development within their first year of practice. The plan had similarities to arrangements within the Probation Service when I joined as a newly qualified probation officer (PO) in the mid-1970s. For the first year POs had a restricted caseload, regular training and development sessions, a programme of supervision, as well as phased reviews at four, eight and one year review/assessment conducted by the Assistant Chief Probation Officer, that led, if

successful, to formal approval by the Probation Committee and then confirmation by the Home Office of status as Probation Officer.

2.5.6 Continuing Professional Development Recommendations

The overarching remit of the SWTF inevitably meant that they had to look beyond initial social work education and training and focused on career development. This included a review of CPD options of how social workers could continue to develop their knowledge bases and update their skills to cope with the changing needs of service users, policies, and legislative frameworks. They recognised that there were barriers to participation in CPD and success of improving was contingent on partnerships as it "depended heavily on sheer commitment from employers, educators, and professionals" (SWTF, 2009, p. 38). The report devoted a comprehensive section to specifically looking at CPD (TCSF, 2009b), which was broadly welcomed by social workers, educators, and employers. It recommended "A more coherent and effective national framework for the continuing professional development of social workers, along with mechanisms to encourage a shift in culture which raises expectations of an entitlement to on-going learning and development" (Recommendation 9 pp. 40-42).

2.5.7 Social Work Reform Board

The Social Work Reform Board was set up in January 2010 under New Labour, with Moira Gibb, continuing as Chair who was reappointed to continue her work following the Coalition Conservative Led Government coming into power in May 2010. Her remit was to develop the Task Force recommendations into firm proposals (DfE, 2010; Bamford, 2015). One recommendation had been for an independent National College of Social Work (SWTF, 2009b), which had been supported by members of the committee, with a number of objectives including, "promoting the public understanding of social work as a public service and as a profession" (Bamford,2015 p.36); to gain the respect and authority, as well as achieve and evidence "high quality social work practice" (SWTF, 2009b) and this would bring social workers into a similar positions as other professions such as nursing, medicine and teaching (TCSW, 2012).

The issues raised in the SWTF report, together with evidence and concerns regarding the GSCC, including a significant backlog of fitness to practice cases, criticism over several management issues, and acritical report from the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence (2009). Authors, such as McLaughlin (2010) and McLaughlin, Leigh and Worsley (2015) analysing the data raised concern about the lengthy delay in hearings, a third of complaints from employers and findings against registrants, with overrepresentation of “men, black staff, disabled and older registrants” (GSCC, 2012, p.61, cited in McLaughlin, Leigh and Worsley, 2015,p.9).

Without warning in 2010, the Coalition Government announced that the GSCC would be closed (2012) and their functions would be transferred to the renamed Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (Jones, D., 2020). It was claimed that this was a cost-cutting measure (Jones, D., 2020, p.46) due to measures arising out of the 2008 financial crisis, but also there was concern that the shift was due to government wanting more control (Garrett, 2018; Rogowski, 2020; Feldman, 2020).

2.5.8 The College of Social Work

The College of Social Work (TCSW) was established in 2012, with funding by the Coalition (Conservative/Liberal) Government with an objective that it would be a national independent organisation, led and run by social workers with a list of overarching objectives (SWTF, 2009b) and be instrumental in taking forward the reforms highlighted by the Task Force. Among its remit was “promoting the public understanding of social work as a public service and as a profession” (Bamford,2015 p.36); with additional objectives to provide “an independent voice for social worker in public and media”, as well as gain the respect and authority, and overall evidence “what makes high quality social work practice” (SWTF, 2009b p.46). This would lead to the same position as other professionals, such as nursing, medicine and teaching (TCSW, 2012). Unfortunately, due to low take up by potential social worker members, lack of funding, and lacking support of the profession it was closed in 2015 (Bamford, 2015; Rogowski, 2020).

TCSW produced the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) (TCSW, 2012a), with a focus on capabilities, rather than the previous NOSs (TOPPS, 2002) which had attracted so much criticism. The PCF had nine domains – professionalism,

values and ethics, diversity, rights justice and economic well-being, knowledge, critical reflection and analysis, intervention and skills, context and organisation, and professional leadership. Each domain had a number of descriptors, defining the knowledge base and competence for each area. It provided for competence across the social work career structure and reinforced the importance of the employers' role in facilitating CPD, as well as the individuals' role and linked this to the regulatory requirement, which Gibbs (M) considered would "build a safe and secure profession" (SWRB, 2009, p.2). Additionally, there was a recognition that this required collaborative working arrangements between organisations, educators, and social workers, as well as an investment in resources and commitment from all parties. BASW (2018) in their documentation on the PCF uses capabilities as the rationale and foundation for this framework, drawing on the definition of Stephenson (1992) who defines capabilities as:

> An integration of knowledge, skills, personal qualities, behaviour, understanding, and values used appropriately, effectively, and confidently, not just in familiar and highly focused specialist contexts but in response to new, complex, and changing circumstances.
>
> (cited in BASW, 2018 as adapted from Stephenson, 1992).

The overall framework provided an outline for a career in social work from initial qualification through to social worker, senior practitioner, advanced practitioner, practice educator, social work manager, and strategic management. The shift to the PCF was widely welcomed by practitioners (BASW, PCF, 2018).

The SWRB remained in place until it was disbanded in September 2013 when the Coalition Government appointed two Chief Social Workers, one for children and families and one for adult service users. However, a lasting initiative devised by the TCSW, the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) (TCSW, 1012a; HCPC, 2012; BASW, 2018) has been preserved and remains a core part of assessment and knowledge information across the spectrum in current practice, and a benchmark used across CPD roles (BASW, PCF, 2018).

2.5.9 Health and Care Professions Council

The GSCC was abolished by the Coalition Government in 2012 and transferring in August regulation of social workers in England to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), an official body regulating fifteen other health professionals (Jones,

D., 2020). Their primary purpose was public protection, maintaining a register of those approved to work in social work, ensure standards, and approve professional training programmes for each profession. However, the change to HCPC as a regulator was not seamless, as they disposed of the National Occupational Standards (TOPPS, 2002) but introduced a further set of standards and principles on social workers – Standards of Proficiency (SoPs) (HCPC, 2012a) that were later benchmarked alongside the PCF (HCPC, 2012b). The PCF was generally a welcomed document by practitioners, employers, and educators (Bamford, 2015) but having to work to two documents was confusing and time consuming. Narey (2014) was critical, proffering that the document "Standards of Proficiency does not remotely provide adequate guidance to universities about the skills and professional knowledge required of graduate social workers" (p.7) and, additionally, considered that the domains should have been framed hierarchically, and was critical that the TCSW and HCPC had not coordinated between them to produce one comprehensive document, describing the two documents as "lost in a sea of genericism (Narey, 2014, p.6). Similarly, Croisdale-Appleby (2014) saw issues with the documents, commenting that "the profession is regulated and endorsed by two very different sets of criteria, which is a continuing major problem which needs to be addressed" (p.18). Whilst there was some difference between the authors in what type of system should be adopted broadly there was agreement that a single set of standards was desirable (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014; Tompsett, 2020).

2.5.10 HCPC Continuing Professional Development Requirements

The HCPC (2012) did not lay down a prescriptive outline of how social workers should undertake CPD – this was left to the individual practitioner. However, there was a requirement "to maintain a continuous, up-to-date and accurate record of their CPD activities and demonstrate that their CPD activities are a mixture of learning activities relevant to current or future practice" (p.4). Importantly practitioners were required to demonstrate how their CPD activities had contributed to the quality of their practice and service delivery, as well as to ensure that it benefited the service user. As guidance HCPC provided a helpful list of activities that could count towards CPD, which was extensive and identified work-based activities, professional activities formal and educational routes, as well as self-directed learning. Universities, private and voluntary organisations in the field of social science and care, also provide a

range of courses/programmes which can be accessed by social workers to meet their CPD requirement. Despite the HCPC identifying what practitioners could count as CPD, limited research in social work to date, indicates that not all practitioners are able to fully participate in these opportunities and CPD is not an area prioritised by organisations or busy practitioners (Halton, Powell, and Scanlan, 2015; YouGov, 2021).

The record of CPD did not need to be submitted to HCPC for re-registration, though 2.5% of registrants would be selected and have their records audited by a (HCPC, 2012). From anecdotal information of discussions with social workers and mentioned by a number of participants in my research, this caused then anxiety and they felt under threat that they would be selected. This is an area and element of fear of non-compliance has also been raised in research by YouGov, (2021) and Worsley (2023).

BASW in their literature in 2018 revised and refreshed the PCF introduced three "super domains". These three overarching domains are titled:

- Purpose: Why do we do what we do as social workers, our values, and ethics and how we approach our work
- Practice: What we do, the specific skills, knowledge, interventions, and critical analytic abilities we develop to act and do social work
- Impact: How we make a difference and how we know we make a difference. Our ability to bring about change through our practice, through our leadership, through understanding our context and through our overall professionalism (BASW, 2018, p.7).

2.5.11 Social Work England

On 14th January 2016, the Secretary of State for Education Nicky Morgan announced that in England social work would be removed from the HCPC regulatory authority and move to its own regulator, thus social workers encountering their third regulator since 2002. Social Work England, the new regulator was set up under the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The Press Release (DfE, 2016) stated that this "the new body will have a relentless focus on raising the quality of social work, education, training and practice in both children's and adult's social work" (DfE, 2016a) and "was to put social workers on par with high-status professions, such as surgeons or lawyers" (n.p.).

The Children and Social Work Bill 2017 established Social Work England (SWE) which was set up as a non-departmental public body, a dedicated regulator for social work operating at arm's length from government (SWE, 2023). Its prime focus is public protection with a wider remit than HCPC. It commenced responsibility for regulatory functions on 2nd December 2019 (Department for Education, 2016a).

The policy statement of the Government envisage that the new regulator would have a wider remit than the current regulator, HCPC. Three primary overarching objectives were identified as: firstly, "to protect, promote and maintain the health, safety and well-being of the public"; secondly "to promote and maintain public confidence in social workers in England and thirdly "to promote and maintain proper professional standards for social workers in England" (Children and Social Work Act, 2017, section.37). An important aim of the new regulator was to put in place "an end-to-end regulatory system that supports high standards of social work practice from initial qualification, into employment and throughout a social work career."

Since its inception, Social Work England has encountered a number of criticisms. Initially it appointed as Chair, Lord Patel of Bradford, for a three-year period. A former social worker by profession, though not registered at the time. The organisation was also criticised for lack of social worker representation on the board, that was addressed by two social workers being added to the board in October 2021 (Smith, 2021a) and staff diversity which was 2.7% whereas organisation membership was 12% of children and family social workers and 15% of adult social workers. This was acknowledged by SWE who plan addressed it through their policies (Samuel, 2020). More recently, in March 2025 SWE gave notice that they planned to raise the registration fee from £90 to £120 per annum, an increase of 33%. They justified higher than expected costs, and that there had been no increase since 2015. The decision was widely criticised by the Principal Social Workers, social workers, UNISON, on social work media platforms, as well as BASW and Social Workers' Union. The latter consider it will negatively impact and cause hardship on practitioners, particularly those earning less especially with the pressures of the cost of living (Samuel, 2025).

Another issue facing SWE is, similar to the previous regulators, GSCC and HCPC have experienced issues in undertaking fitness to practice (FTP) hearings, resulting in some registrants having very lengthy delays in a decision concerning a complaint against them. SWE state the delays have been caused by inheriting a number of complex cases from the previous regulator (HCPC), plus an increase in number of complaints and there has also been a shortage of staff to deal with decision-making. The recent average has increased to 128 weeks (Samuel, 2025). The DfE is providing the SWE regulator with £5.2m for the current year to use to address the problems, including an increase in staff to undertake triage work. It plans to set a new target for investigations to 54 weeks or less and increasing the number of hearings, as well as recruitment and training of in-house legal advocacy staff for its FTP group, rather than outsourcing (Samuel, 2025).SWE envisage that by taking these measures will reduce FTP cases that proceed to full investigation.

2.5.12 Social Work England Continuing Professional Development requirements

When Social Work England was established as regulator I December 2019, each registrant was required to provide one piece of CPD, as accordance with Standard 4 (Continuing Professional Development) of the six Professional Standards. There was no prescribed list of what should be submitted but the descriptors highlight expectations around keeping up to date, record use of research, theories and frameworks, reflect on own values, challenge and evaluate impact on practice, as well as demonstrate incorporating knowledge of social work and current societal issues that impact on practice. It does not provide a list of learning opportunities to integrate into your narrative submission but has, over time, provided written guidance, as well as videos, webinars, lectures, and various sessions to aid CPD learning. The submission is undertaken by online portal that is run by SWE.

In 2022, the regulator, SWE, increased the mandatory annual submission to two pieces of work, one which must include a peer reflection as evidence (SWE,2021d). Whilst not prescribing the subject area, SWE supplied a list of practitioners' roles who could act as peer. This likewise was to be submitted online. SWE provides two types of templates that registrants can use that have focused headings, or alternatively, registrants can provide their own format.

Auditing was, until 2024, random selection of 2.5% of CPD uploaded onto the system and reviewed by the regulator. However, in 2024 the regulator decided not to continue with the annual audit as it stated it was reviewing the process but did audit a number of practitioners work who had been identified in 2023 as having issues. SWE have advised that they will not be returning to the annual audit in 2025 as they propose to undertake a planned consultation on reforms in 2026-2027 (Samuel, 2025).

The four UK regulators have dissimilar requirements for CPD from registrants. In April 2025, Social Care Wales changed their system no longer requiring registrants every three years to complete 90 hours of CPD. Registrants must still comply with code of practice standard 6.9 by continuing to undertake relevant learning and development to improve and develop their practice. However, they will not be required to log the CPD but are encouraged to keep records of their learning, discuss these with their manager “and that it may check a sample of records” (Samuel, 2025). Whilst this could relieve some pressure on registrants unintentionally it could also cause anxiety in case selected to provide records.

2.6 Government Interventions

2.6.1 Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE)

As previously indicated the Social Work Task Force was influenced by the issues raised in Lord Laming’s second report (2009) and these were explored further by the Social Work Task Force who were tasked with making recommendations for improvement and reform of the whole social work profession. This resulted in Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (Skills for Care, 2012) programme being rolled out in England for all statutory social work departments. This built on the previous Newly Qualified Social Worker Programme (2008-11), which had achieved relatively high completion rates and a favourable evaluation from Carpenter, Patsios, Wood, Platt, Shardlow, Scholar, Haines, Wong and Blewett (2012) and Berry-Lound and Rowe (2013), who highlighted that regular supervision, as well as protected caseloads were positive factors, and these were interwoven into the structure of the programme. The first ASYE programme commenced in September 2012. It was not compulsory for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) in their first year of

employment within the statutory sector, but it is an expectation that authorities will offer this opportunity and newly qualified social workers will participate. It was backed up by government funding and through Skills for Care, with also funding for the voluntary and private sector. The programme had three broad aims: 1) to ensure consistency of support for NQSWs; opportunity to develop critically reflective practice and become more confident and more capable professionals, and this support to be underpinned by a robust assessment process designed to assure standards. To participate in the programme, NQSWs were to have no more than 90% of full caseloads. Alongside this structured programme runs over a twelve-month period, with assessment at various intervals. The expectation was that NQSWs would have the opportunity of consolidating and integrating their knowledge and skills drawn from their qualifying programmes and develop expertise relating to their service user group and employment setting. To participate in the programme NQSWs were to have a structured programme with study leave (ASYE, 2012).

Findings from small-scale research by Bailey and Sach (2015) relating to the Eastern Region of the UK reported that over 90% of ASYE participants who had been engaged in the University programme were enthusiastic and valued the teaching and assessment input. Those surveyed were especially positive about time to develop critical and reflective skills on practice issues and acquire new skills and learning. However, it also noted that some were overwhelmed by the demands of their new roles that caused them emotional stress. A positive factor noted was following the introduction of the ASYE programme there had been improvement in staff retention, with staff development officers considering that the programme had enabled NQSWs to 'ground' their practice, increase skills in analysis and with this gain confidence in their ability (Bailey and Sach, 2015).

2.6.2 Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS)

The two chief social workers appointed in 2014 devised two sets of Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS), one for Children and Family Social Work and one for Social Workers in Adult Services, both at post-qualifying level (DfE, 2014; DoH, 2015). These statements set out what social workers should know and be able to do at the end of their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment. Rogowski (2020) considered "they were divisive as they separated social workers at an early stage of

their careers, rather than providing a competency statement applying to all social workers" (p.148). The introduction of KSS statements were also seen as undermining the PCF that had devised a framework that applied throughout practitioners' careers, especially in distinct roles. Similarly, Jones, R., (2019) also saw KSS as divisive, particularly separating children and family and adult practitioners at early stages in their careers, and too considered this undermined the PCF that had been devised by social work practitioners. Further concern was raised about the danger of government being involved in devising practice areas and shaping the future social work educational curriculum and having control over post qualification development of social workers (Jones, R., 2019; Rogowski, 2020). A further concern was voiced by Jones, D., (2019) about possible future political control over social work and resources being privatised.

Although the KSS do not have any statutory function they are used as a benchmark in practice within organisations for performance management and embedded into the into supervision. Additionally, they are being used to gain government funding for sponsored initiatives (Hanley, 2022a). The KSS map onto the practice domains of the PCF and are intended to provide a guide for day-to-day practice (Joint statement DHSC, DfE and BASW, March 2018) and have subsequently The Chief Adult Social Worker has also been instrumental in devising the Capabilities Statement for working with older people (July,2018) that is comprehensive, and provides a good overview of different theories, knowledge and policy that is required to practise within adult services.

In 2018 BASW issued a statement regarding the KSS and stressed that there was no need to meet all the capabilities, and it is not mandatory to follow. However, it provides a comprehensive framework and an outline of knowledge, theory, models of social work, ethics, and values that align with the IFSW definition of social work, highlighting that this has been considered when devising the document.

The KSS standards were rebranded in May 2018 to Post-Qualifying Standards: Knowledge and Skills Statement for child and family practitioners (PQS). Also issued were separate standards for practice supervisors and knowledge and skill statement for practice leads.

2.6.3 National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS)

The national assessment and accreditation system (NAAS) for social workers was announced in 2017 and commenced in 2018 with a pilot scheme. Its objectives were to enable child and family social workers to evaluate their own knowledge and skills, understand how and what they needed to develop, employers to raise standards, improve outcomes for children and families, understand where workforce needed to be targeted, using supervision, performance management, and development.

The initial intention was to provide accreditation and assessment of 30,000 social work practitioners by 2020, but the number was reduced to between 1200 and 2,300. From the outset the scheme proved contentious, with criticisms from practitioners, professional organisations, and Unions. Questions were being asked why the government were funding a scheme at a time of austerity with the view that finances could more effectively be used in frontline services Turner (2019). A number of private firms were awarded costly contracts to develop the accreditation schemes. Some councils were offering £1,000 for practitioners to take part (Turner, 2019). There was concern about long-term sustainability of the scheme and concern about how this finance would affect other services. Members of Unison were asked to boycott the scheme. Since being introduced in 2018, by 2020, 1,700 frontline practitioners and practice supervisors had been accredited, 5% of the workforce (Preston, 2022). The scheme had cost £24 m. In 2020, the national rollout of the scheme was delayed. In January 2022, the government scrapped the NAAS with it closing in March 2022.

2.6.4 Early Career Framework (ECF)

The Social Work Early Career Framework (ECF) (SWECF) programme is designed to provide newly qualified social workers in England with support, replacing the one-year ASYE induction programme, extending the period for two years and will be mandatory. It will be fully funded by the DfE, with implementation plans in for September 2027 providing it receives Treasury funding (DfE, 2024). The Social work Induction Programme (SWIP) would be open only initially for practitioners working in statutory local authority social work.

The aim of DfE is to provide a structured two-year development work-based programme to “produce high-quality, standardised curriculum and training materials,

based on the Post-Qualifying Standards." Additionally, to support employers in delivering the SWIP and promote national consistency. A further objective is to increase retention of practitioners.

The proposal was that social workers would be assessed against the new PQS at the end of the two years, and, similarly to the ASYE, assessment would be by employers, evaluated by an assessor and not a nationally prescribed assessment system.

2.6.5 Chapter Summary

The chapter charts the different political and ideological contexts in which social work education, training, and practice has developed, highlighting how these have shaped the context in which social workers' practice. It demonstrated that in England specifically there has been more state intervention and control of social work as a profession, extending to surveillance, accountability and regulation, thus lessening the individual autonomy and discretion of the practitioner. This has resulted in continuous crises around recruitment and retention, which affects service delivery and well-being of staff. Continually moving the goalposts with regard to regulatory requirement, changes of government, policies, and developments has had significant implications for framing of CPD for social work. Aspects of this continuing evolution and impact practitioner participants practitioners are explored in the findings' sections.

Issues of oversight, regulation, and surveillance also inform the theoretical framework for the study which is set out in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

The chapter will explore the contribution of four key century theorists, Mills (1959), Freire (1970), Fromm (1976), and Foucault (1977). My rationale for choice stems from my experience as a student social worker when I was introduced on my course to their philosophical stances, theoretical constructs, and ideas. At that time, their writings were at the embryonic stage and controversial, particularly amongst sociologists. However, their ideas remain challenging and influential in theoretical debates. Theorists, such as Gregory and Holloway (2005) emphasise that social work is a "political activity" (p.44) and, similarly, Gilbert and Powell (2005), whose ideas have clear connections to present-day social work practice, view it as being shaped and influenced by who are required respond to the dynamics and challenges of shifting priorities of government. Contemporary social work scholars also explore the continuing relevance of these thinkers to social work theory and practice (Garrett, 2018).

For instance, Mills' Sociological Imagination, raises personal troubles/issues that transcend the local environments of individuals, these are beyond their control and effected by social structures, therefore become a public matter. Governments tend to present public issues as private troubles, which are individualised and pathologised, rather than looking at the systems or taking account of structural inequalities. Social workers are involved to address problems/issues through working with individuals, rather than looking for a community-based solutions. This highlights the shift in social work practice in England and elsewhere from *cause* to *case* advocacy, an important critique of contemporary practice that focuses on addressing individual symptoms of inequality rather than taking a more transformative approach to social justice. This casework approach is often implemented through socialising individuals into the dominant norms and values of the state, for example through attendance at Early Help, Troubled Families Initiatives, or involvement in reinforcing the legislative framework as agents of the state, for example as Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP). State intervention is not only applied to individuals but also social workers with perspective that practice issues will be resolved through regulation of profession, requiring further training and development throughout career

of undertaking CPD. Mills' themes also play out through the public discourse surrounding social work primarily through the media that becomes a personal trouble for social workers.

The second theorist Freire's had central ideas based on humanisation and democratic ideals, focusing on the relationship between the oppressors and oppressed. Core to social work practice are ethics and values, which are based on equality, worth, and dignity of individuals (SWE, 2019). Relationship-base practice (Ruch, 2005), is the aim of interaction between social worker and service user (client), with an overall objective of empowering individuals and promoting self-determination.

Freire was particularly interested in, and critical of the educational system, where knowledge was seen as being transmitted by the dominant culture, whereas students were seen as "being ignorant, empty vessels," and passive recipients (Freire, 1972, p.47). Freire viewed the educational system as "oppressive" believing there was a need to break down teacher/student relationship. As a solution he promoted problem-solving pedagogy that was based on communication and dialogue, urging people to promote this model in preference to banking concept of education.

Social work in England has been under siege for many years, specifically facing criticism from the media (Munro, 2020; Leedham, 2022; Hanley, 2024/2025) and government about their role and effectiveness. This has led to the social work curriculum being highly influenced and controlled by central government and employers. As indicated above, social workers are required to demonstrate that to continue to practice, they have complied with the terms set out Social Work England, the profession's regulator. This context makes the prospects for transformative social work, and kinds of CPD that would re-orientate practice towards this goal seem ever more elusive.

Erich Fromm's *To Have or to Be?* (1976) provides a humanistic framework that challenges the focus of today's society, where there is drive for individualism, ownership, possession, and exclusivity. Socal Work is seen as an aspect of the consumer society, with service users being the customers (Thomas, 2018). Looking through Fromm's lens of ideas, they are relevant today especially the shift of social work that has become bureaucratised, manualised, and influenced as claimed by McDonaldisation of practice (Ritzer, 1993), where the focus is on quantity, with a key driver in policy and practice being the minimisation of risk. Overall, Fromm's work provides a wealth of knowledge and ideas of positive ways of working with service users, particularly establishing relationships, enabling personal growth, and practising in the context of anti-oppressive social work, all areas that enable a shift towards the 'being mode.'

Michel Foucault, the fourth theorist is one of the primary influential social theorists and philosophical thinkers of the 20th century who wrote extensively on a range of historical ideas and areas that remain embedded in contemporary discussions. Although the application of Foucault's ideas to social work has been critiqued as overlooking the detachment that runs through much of his work and as missing some of the fundamental complexities of power and governmentality (Garrett, 2018), my analysis of data demonstrates that these ideas remain pertinent and connect to current social work practice issues, particularly areas, such as power, knowledge, surveillance, discipline and punishment, governmentality and transmission of norms and values. Take together these theories have implications for both social worker and service users. For instance, power is fundamental to the relationship between the social worker as a professional and service user and arena and role in which they operate. Another example is applying power through discretion at certain levels of their roles (Lipsky, 1980); when exercising power as a state expert in various fields of practice, such as an Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP); areas of child protection and monitoring and recommendations to courts. Equally, social workers' practice is subjected to power through being subjected to information and communication technologies (ICT) that has subjected them to every increased form of surveillance of their practice, audit of their reports, calendar, and workload

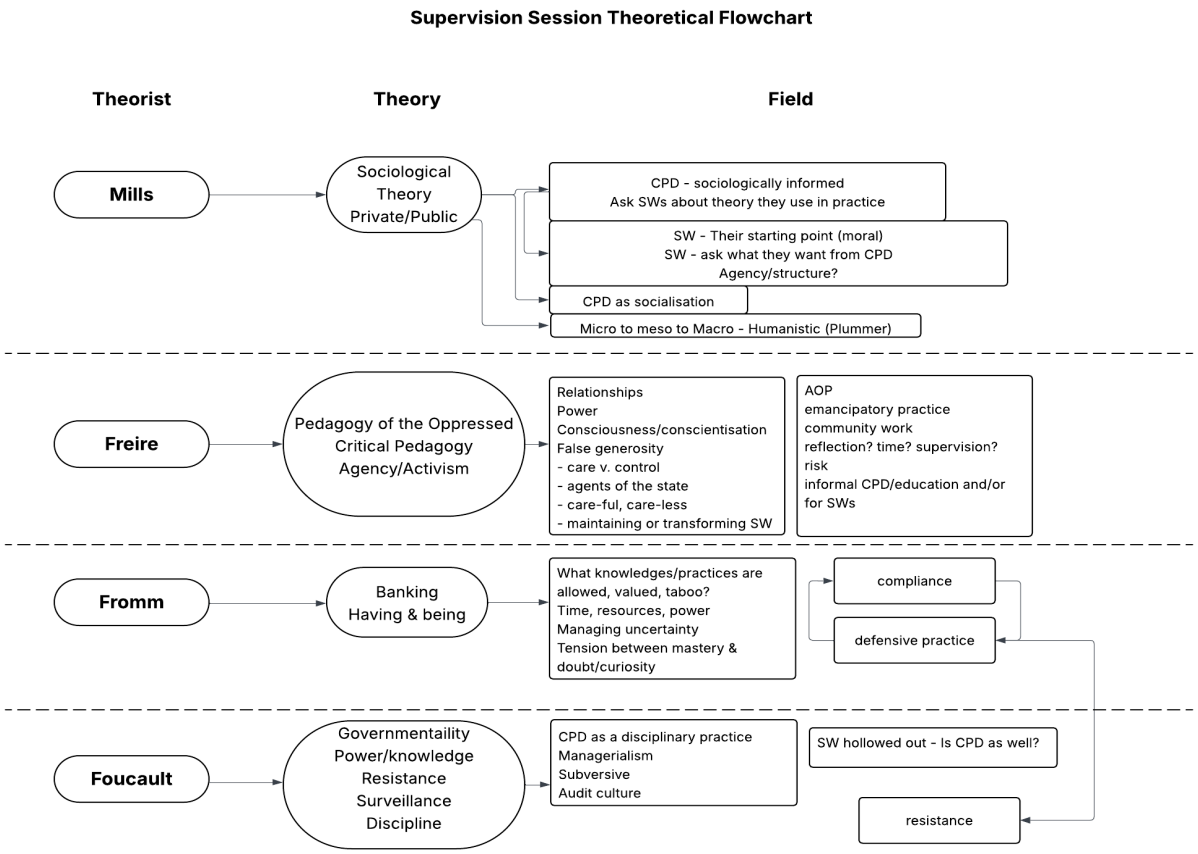
management, with accountability for timeframe of work and time management of their tasks.

The four thinkers' ideas have informed my theoretical framework base and are relevant to analysis of the current situation for social workers in their practice and professional identity where they are managing public issues and personal troubles (Mills, 1959). Freire (1970) framed education and learning as a potentially emancipatory endeavour, whereas Fromm (1976) points to some of the tensions between the authentic and performative in learning in modes of having and being. Foucault (1977) reveals the power dynamics that are inherent in these tensions that inform the day-to-day practice of social workers in England.

This is a deliberately rich approach to the theoretical framework to the study and seeks to harness key critical aspects from each author, acknowledging overlaps, disagreement and complementarities between the theories selected. A visual presentation of the four theorists and their positions is at Appendix 2 – p.322.

The aim of developing the Theoretical Framework is to link the theorists' different constructs to social work practice and continuing professional development, the focus of my research. The following diagram is a summary of the ideas brought to life within a supervision session early in my PhD journey. Below is a Theoretical Flowchart Diagram prepared from the original whiteboard diagram that was prepared in a supervision session. This can also be viewed in Appendix 4 – p.324. The original photograph of the whiteboard diagram can be viewed in Appendix 3 – p.323.

Appendix 4: Supervision Session Theoretical Flowchart Diagram



The chapter will cover the theorists' contributions and links to social work individually. For instance, Mills (1959) focused on examining the connection between personal troubles and public issues, social issues, socialisation, bureaucracy, power, and the influence of power illustrated by Mills in The Power Elite (Mills,1956) on managerial elitism, all themes relevant to issues raised in contemporary social work practice.

Freire (1970) was interested in the themes of humanitarianism, alienation, how education was delivered which he saw as largely one-way, non-participatory approach, aptly naming this "banking of education". Other themes associated with learning included critical pedagogy, praxis, and the importance of problem-posing to reach conscientisation.

Similarly, Fromm (1976) took a humanisation approach to his extensive psychological/psychotherapeutic when writings about individuals coping with struggles in their lives. However, for the Theoretical Framework discussion and links

to my study I will be focusing on his writings in his book To Have or To Be? (Fromm, 1976) that focuses on individuals in the context of “having and being”, and the struggle they experience in trying to find self-discovery and freedom. His extensive writings give insight and understanding of individuals’ experiences and are key to having an in-depth understanding in social work and probation practice.

As discussed later in this chapter key Foucauldian major themes and concepts include archaeology, genealogy, discourse, power/knowledge, technologies of self, subjectivities, panopticon, surveillance, governmentality, discipline and punishment, identity, episteme.

The theorists’ observations and analysis of historical societal issues are extensive, and I have drawn on these to make theoretical connections between the complex issues social workers face in their everyday practice, and connection to continuing professional development (CPD). Additionally, they inform the rationale of the research design methodology and methods. However, due to word limitation not all will be reviewed extensively in this chapter but will be drawn on during the findings and discussion sections.

These following sections will first draw on the themes and ideas of the Mills, Freire, Fromm, and Foucault, review these, draw any comparisons, or note where they are not aligned, and related these to various roles and requirements of social work practice and education.

3.2 Theoretical Perspectives of C Wright Mills

In this first section I propose to draw on the work of C Wright Mills, a sociologist, whose work was written during the Cold War and drew on feelings of powerlessness among individuals (Orwell, 1949). In his book, The Sociological Imagination (Mills, 1959), Mills was critical of sociologists at that time, seeing their work as being abstract and wide ranging, rather than the social sciences focusing on the realities of life experiences. Mills defined the Sociological Imagination as “the vivid awareness of the relationship between experiences and the wider society” (Mills, 1959, p.6). He

believed that sociology needed to make more of a connection between public and private issues to be of more benefit to society as a whole. Sociology, in Mills' view, can enable individuals to see how their personal troubles are related to social or public issues. Cunningham and Cunningham (2008) maintain that it is essential for social workers to developing a *'Sociological Imagination'* (p.6), to be able to be aware of problems that affect service users who are often the most vulnerable and impoverished individuals who are faced with an array of complex issues. Mills develops his ideas along several themes relevant to society.

Although Mills was not a social worker, he had a close relationship with the profession, and his themes and research are relevant to social work practice. Two influential themes focus on the individual and their place within society. The first focused on personal troubles of an individual and how these affected their lives. Whereas when similar problems manifest themselves in a significant amount of the population Mills maintained it shifts to being labelled as a 'social problem or public issue,' as it goes beyond the individual's personal control or resolution. Mills suggests that the interconnection between the personal and public issues can be viewed through the lens of a *Sociological Imagination.* To do so Mills used a sociological perspective to view society from a historical context, with Foucault (1972) taking a similar historical viewpoint through his work on archaeology/genealogy of knowledge and culture (see discussion below).

One of the benefits of taking a sociological perspective, a key subject area in social work education, is that it helps social workers reconsider situations, in what is attributed to Berger (1963) that he termed, "taken for granted assumptions". Readers are encouraged to dissect them, using a sociological lens and knowledge, critically reflecting, and looking at the bigger picture that affect people's lives. This process enables social workers to understand the structure of society, observe the patterns, processes, and situations of social life from micro to macro perspectives and understand how these affect service users' lives. A comparable view is taken by Peter Berger (1963) in his writings, who suggests that "The familiar now seems not quite so familiar anymore" (p.22). Importantly, sociological knowledge is a core social

science that social workers should possess to practise and is enshrined in the Global Definition of Social Work (2014), as well as in the Professional Capabilities Framework – Domain 5 (BASW, 2018). The salience of Mills's analysis is reflected in continuing calls for social work to embrace the sociological imagination more fully in theory and practice (Houston, 2014).

Social work practice should be based on engagement and is relationship-based (Trevithick, 2004), as it is an intervention that occurs at points in peoples' lives when they need help to address personal troubles or issues. Reflecting historically on the role of the state it has seen it as the business of the state to intervene when private matters become public issues of concern. Observing Mills' (1959) stance he was critical of the professional ideology of some social workers, who he reminded us were normally agents of the state (Payne, 2005), a role which applies in an English context, also highlighted by Bourdieu (2002) as affecting their ability to be autonomous in their practice across a range of areas (Wiegmann, 2017 p.106-70). Alongside other social workers who practise as agents of change (Pincus and Minahan, 1973). Some, he asserted, saw personal troubles as a private matter, rooted in the individual, pathologising them for, and blaming them for their misfortune, and/or failing to adhere to social and cultural norms embedded in a particular society. Additionally, he was critical of social workers failing to take on board structural or systemic failures within society that contribute to service user problems and focusing on individual adjustment (Mills, 1967, p.534). Mills commented that in these circumstances the social worker's role shifted to exercising more control over service users to try and socialise them into dominant norms and values of society rather than look for more community-based solutions or speaking out for social change. Mills stressed the importance of social workers, whilst understanding the individual needs of service users, also understanding of the 'bigger picture,' especially the social processes and extensive social structures which impact and shape individuals' lives (Cunningham and Cunningham, 2008). The social worker has to keep an open mind, view situations holistically, apply analytical skills, be self-critical (Ferguson, 2018) and consider possible options to guide decision-making and actions (Burgess and Jackson, 1990) Mills's interweaving of personal troubles and public issues provide a strong starting point for these tasks. For instance, individual social workers are blamed when they

fail to identify an issue, such as child neglect or abuse, when they believed the parents with whom they were working were addressing issues. Criticism levelled at social workers in various government inquiries in the UK (e.g. Laming, 2003; Brandon, Belderson, Warren, Howe, Gardner, Dodsworth, and Black, (2008); Dickens, Taylor, Cook, Cossar, Garstang, Hallet, Molloy, Rennolds, Rimmer, Sorensen, and Wate, 2022a) indicated that social workers failed to identify parents' "disguised compliance" (Reder, Duncan and Gray,1993), and ongoing risks that led to the death of a child. This resulted in government and media blaming, leading to social work becoming a discredited profession (Koutsounia, 2023; SWE, 2024).The omissions are seen as a result of individual social worker failings, whereas other factors that impact on social work practice, (such as structural and environmental factors inherent in communities, issues around poverty, the impact of social problems or rationalisation of resources or lack of accountability by adults for their behaviour), are largely ignored in evaluation of a particular incident or fatality (Jones, R.,2014).

3.3 Theoretical Perspectives of Paulo Freire

Moving onto the contribution of Freire, (1970), his life-long work was committed to social change. Freire's philosophy and methods were associated with adult education, initially focusing on literacy to empower oppressed workers in Brazil, but his work has contributed to educational debate worldwide and influenced teaching approaches, both in the field of adult and children.

Whilst not a social worker, Freire was closely associated with social workers through his community work and many of his concepts are closely connected to social work and these are, in my view, critical to how social workers approach and practise in their chosen field. Areas, such as relationship-based practice, empowering of individuals with whom they work, as well as ability to critically reflect on their practice to achieve higher knowledge and skills, as well demonstrating values and ethics. Freire's contribution in the field of educational philosophy was extensive but for the purpose of this section I am proposing to concentrate on those areas relevant to my field of study. Freire's concepts I will be exploring in this section will include humanisation, pedagogy, conscientisation, praxis, dialogue, banking of education

and problem-posing that are relevant in my research around continuing professional development for social workers, and their relationship to practice (Freire, 1970).

We can draw on Freire's insights to take us to the heart of the question, what is the purpose of CPD in social work? A central theme of Freire's philosophy and relevance to social work practice is the dichotomy between "humanisation and dehumanisation" (Freire, 1972 p.20). Freire theorised that people strive to become more human but have been dehumanised by historical oppression, characterised by "injustice, exploitation and violence" (Freire, 1970, pp 25-26), which places his work within a Marxian tradition (Kress and Lake, 2013; Darder, 2018). Freire suggests that "social workers must each confront "a moment of decision" in which they "pick the side of change which is pointed in the direction of humanisation…. [or they] are left in the position of favouring stagnation" (Freire n.d. cited in Minkler, 2000, p.26). Becker (1967) similarly poses "The question is not whether we should take sides, since we inevitably will but rather whose side are we on "(p. 239). The key theme of humanisation is a central tenet of social work, which grew out of humanitarian and democratic ideals, and is closely connected with social work's ethics and values, which are based on equality, worth, dignity, human rights, and social justice (IFSW, 2014; BASW, PCF, 2014, 2021; Domain 2; SWE, 2019). This raises a point borne out in the data from the present study around whether CPD functions to cement existing ways of practising or to facilitate new ways of doing social work.

The interaction between the social worker and service user is relationship -based practice (Ruch, 2005), and person-centred practice, which is similar to that advocated by Freire's "people-centred development" and Carl Rogers (1961) and based on humanistic collaboration to promote positive change. It is interesting to note that at the time when Freire (1970s) was writing about his ideas/concepts that the UK social work profession had started to engage and write about themes of anti-discrimination, and the need for these to be addressed in practice. This was included in the training and education of prequalifying social workers (CCETSW, Paper 30, 1989). There was a requirement for social work students to demonstrate this knowledge and integrate into practice. However, this was a contested area, causing political and

media backlash (Bottomley, 1992; Philips, 1993; Dominelli, 1996). Coincidentally, around this time Freire had been particularly criticised for his lack of acknowledgement in his earlier writings about gender and diversity issues, using inappropriate language, writing from a patriarchal stance, and taking a colonial perspective, as well as paying insufficient attention to structural inequalities, which are facilitators of oppression (Misiaszek, 2022a). However, his later research indicates that he took account of the changing context, engaged with the feminist movement, and in his writings looked more closely at gender issues, as well as moderating his previous sexist language (Freire and Macedo, 1996, cited in Minkler, 2000). In the United States America (USA) social workers are having to deal with the Trump administration backlash against the diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) polices that were brought in to promote fair treatment of underrepresented or discriminated groups but have now in large part been rescinded. A report by Mel Wilson, of the NASW, union for social workers in USA stated they were appalled by the Executive Order ending DEI in Federal Government and were committed to working to counter the Executive Order (www.socialworkers.org), with their stance being supported by UK social workers.

Freire explores the dichotomy between oppressor/oppressed, the tension and interdependence that arises because of historic conventions based on a hierarchical system which have become the pattern and contrasts with the freedom to live within society (Freire, 1970). One of the drawbacks highlighted by Freire is that because of distortion, and internalising of beliefs and ideas by those oppressed, “non-oppressors can hinder their struggle for freedom when they hold onto the values and methods of the oppressors” (Freire, 1970, p.26). Change is contingent on dialogue of both oppressor and oppressed relearning these previously held beliefs.

In his work Freire draws from Marxian anti-colonial theories to explore themes, particularly ideological positions of the ruling class and its relationship to oppression, using terms by Marx and Engels (1965), as oppressed people having *false consciousness,* a key Freirean concept. This is one of the ways through which the dominant ideological culture becomes “an instrument of domination” (Freire, 1972,

p.123) controlling individual choice and promoting alienation. False consciousness, therefore, is a belief held for the purpose of reinforcing a given power structure constraining less powerful individuals' views and thoughts. The system is sustained by the oppressor feeling good about their false generosity, the ideology of the oppressor being internalised which, in Freire's view, can only be destroyed by a commitment to destroying the causes (Freire, 1970). This concept is of enduring relevance to social work if we consider the bureaucratisation of the profession and lack of progress in achieving social justice.

Alienation is an important theme raised in this context and not new in social work research and can be applied to service user and social worker experiences regarding the concept of powerlessness and lack of control over their lives. For example, Jones, C. (2001) interviewed a significant range of state social workers on their role who complained about the "growing intensity of bureaucracy and paperwork" which had increased significantly over the years and had to speed up work and were having to deal with "poor and sometimes aggressive managerialism" (Jones, C., 2001, p.552).

A further potential source of alienation in social work lies in bureaucratic regulatory changes affecting the ability for social workers to be creative in their practice (Bryne, Kirwan and Guckin, 2019). This can result in lack of trust by management to make decisions and an invalidation of their abilities and skills leading to an inability to be autonomous practitioners and disempowers them when working with service users (Parton, 1996).The growth of managerialism, with routine roles and lack of professional discretion has, according to Jones, C. (2001), led to alienation of social workers. This can be translated to work with service users in terms of lack of trust or working in partnership, with assessments undertaken using a deficit model (Skodol, 2010) and failure to recognise servicer user perspectives or their strengths. Although the idea of bureaucratic rationality in social work may be a seductive one (as evidenced by the current fashion for manualised social work in the UK), the major contribution by Weber (1905) was his dystopian vision of bureaucracy using the metaphor of an "iron cage", that was dehumanising for individuals, stifling and trapping them, and their crushing creativity (Weber, 1905).Focusing on social work

education and continuing professional development a similar situation can arise when the organisation agenda dominates. This can lead to social workers 'opting out,' being resistant, and paying lip service to any training confirmation. For instance, SWE reported that 60% of social workers had not yet renewed their registration two weeks before the deadline (Samuel, 2024). Is this the product of a chronically overworked profession or a kind of grudging adherence or resistance to this regulatory requirement? For CPD to be beneficial and meet the needs of social workers it needs to be based on a partnership/shared model. Ferguson and Lavalette (2004) in their paper, draw on the Marxist concept of alienation, believing that this can only be overcome by developing emancipatory approach to teaching and learning with more collective approaches, which will also be beneficial to social work service users.

A damaging outcome of being oppressed, according to Freire, is that it leads to estrangement from self and others and being submerged in the oppressor's "unauthentic world" where their worldview creates "emotional dependence and adherence" (Freire, 1970). This not only affects the oppressed individual's functioning but also leads to disempowerment, loss of agency, self-efficacy, and ability to become self-determining. Social worker practitioners have attracted considerable criticism from politicians and the public, with claims that social work interventions encourage dependency "seen by neo-liberals as being amongst the principal culprits of dependency creation" (Jones, C., 2001, p.553). The criticism of social workers is not only orientated to work with service users as in research on social work supervision, Frogget (2000) found implied criticism by senior managers that the '*culture of dependency'* (p.32), was prevalent amongst social workers in their own practise, claiming they deferred any decision making to senior management for approval. However, the structure within local authorities has largely removed professional autonomy from individual social workers other than routine tasks as they must defer to managers for decisions, for instance around funding, service provision, such as care packages or in childcare whether a case should be referred for court proceedings. Linking this to CPD social workers are given very little choice to decide what type of development or route they wish to follow, as opportunities are contingent on the agency programme and/or their priorities. According to Freire (1970) the solution is through liberatory pedagogy but essentially this must be "forged with not

for the oppressed" (p.48). Transformation of the world, according to Freire, can only occur through praxis, "which is combination of reflection and action" (Freire, 1972, p.52).

3.3.1 Banking of Education

Freire's writings focused on pedagogy, drawing from the work of Plato (428-348 BC), as well as Marxist and anti-post-colonial authors, such as Frantz Fanon (1963) and Albert Memmi (1957, cited in Darder, 2018, p.77). Freire maintained that education per se was not neutral, with traditional modes of education being introduced to the masses to bring about conformity and serve labour requirements under capitalism, with him being particularly critical of this concept of education. He saw this as an "instrument of oppression" (Freire, 1970 cited in Darder, 2018, p.107), an approach where the teacher narrates the subject, the student memorising the subject mechanically – a rote method – with the teacher seeing the student as a "container" or "receptacle" to be "filled". The more the teacher deposits the student the better the student is (Freire, 1970, p.53). The approach towards education highlighted by Freire and was seen as critical to the development of industrialisation in UK and was facilitated through the Elementary Education Act 1870 that introduced free compulsory education. The teaching system largely replicates the pattern espoused by Freire (1970) above. This provided an elementary education for the working-class population, and, additionally, was introduced to enable individuals to cope with the shift from rural society to urban life, so that they could service the then increasing demands of industrialisation. However, some authors, such as Stephens (1998) suggest this shift was a "tool of social control", rather than being philanthropic. This model highlighted above by Freire remained a feature of UK system of education for many years and remains the pattern in many worldwide educational systems.

Freire (1970) considered the Banking Knowledge approach, where experts dominate, to be paternalistic, as it required students to be passive recipients, receiving the "knowledge as a gift transmitted from knowledgeable experts to people who that lack that knowledge" (Freire, 1970, p.74).The banking approach towards education, according to Freire, turned women and men into automatons, the very negation of

their ontological vocation to be more fully human (Freire, 1970, p.55). Freire (1970) maintained the approach required people to adjust to their situations, as the hierarchical power embedded in the system negated against an education that was based on trust and inquiry (Higham, 2006). Freire was also influenced by the work, ethics, and values espoused by Simone de Beauvoir (Kirylo, 2020), seeing the banking model of education as attempting to change "the consciousness of the oppressed and not the situation which oppresses them" (Freire, 1970, cited in Darder, 2018, p.109). He inferred that often the curriculum and experience were detached from the student's reality and life experiences, which reinforced their disempowering positions. Freire contended that for people to fight and achieve liberation they need to become aware of their "objectification" (Higham, 2006, p.137). He denounced the banking approach, urging individuals who were committed to change and freedom to "reject the banking concept in its entirety" (Freire, 1970, p.60). There are clear signs of imperatives for banking knowledge in social work: the pre-and post-qualifying curriculum is highly influenced and controlled by central government with input from local authority employers and funding being predicated on programmes meeting specific requirements.

Social work programmes attract a diverse range of the population in terms of education, class, age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and cultures (UCAS, 2020; Samuel, 2020). Therefore, it is important that the teaching strategy takes these factors into account. Additionally, taking a Freirean approach, the teaching curriculum needs to build in measures to acknowledge any negative life experiences, educational or oppression faced by students and empower them through shared approaches to learning, as well as validate or be sensitive to any previous life experiences. This is particularly important when widening participation in social work programmes where assessment criteria for assignments include critical evaluation of equality issues, as well as their own experiences. Taking this approach would also meet SWE professional standards that require social workers to integrate into their practice equality issues. These strategies correlate with the principles espoused by Freire (1972) on adult teaching, where he stressed the importance of valuing students own experiences, their involvement in designing the curriculum, and importantly given space to reflect on their learning experience (Freire, 1972, cited in Beaumont and

Cemlyn, 2005, p.47), and, additionally there is social work user involvement in social work education normally at during the selection process, as well as direct teaching on service user perspective. This is also echoed by Lister (2003) who stressed the importance of adopting a participatory approach with new entrants to social work using discussion, feedback, and modelling to make use of their previous learning (Lister, 2003 cited in Beaumont and Cemlyn, 2005) and Butler, Elliott, and Stopard, (2003) who widen the debate to include students, practice educators and tutors and highlight the benefits of a collaborative approach to teaching of "oppressive structures and attitudes" (Butler, Elliott and Stopard,2003, cited in Burgess and Taylor, 2005) and ensuring that holistic strategies are in place for minority groups of students. The student voice is a key factor to facilitate changes in teaching and learning strategies to promote more inclusion and is seen as a key element in retention strategies (Beaumont and Cemlyn, 2005, cited in Burgess and Taylor, 2005).

3.3.2 Problem-Posing Education Model

To further this end, Freire promoted social pedagogy to replace the banking model with the problem-posing education model, "which is a bottom-up educational model" (Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014, p.76). Central to Freire's view is that pedagogy is informed by "a humanising praxis, where the relationship of human beings is central to teaching and learning" (Darder, 2018 p.112). Freire saw this approach as offering "a unique and different teaching and learning model" (Freire, 1970, p.60), which hinged on student and teacher working in partnership to investigate knowledge and the world. Students needed to be actively involved in the educational process called critical pedagogy, although Freire did not give it that label. The model here is that the teacher is the facilitator, encouraging open dialogue between the student and themselves. The adult student is encouraged to explore their reality as a 'problem' to be transformed with the educator/teacher helping them to achieve a form of critical thinking or conscientization (Freire, 1970). This did not mean that Freire negated his responsibilities and role as a teacher. However, whilst some authors consider he rejected teaching methods that were directive (Smidt, 2003; Biesta, 2017, Taylor, 1993 and Young, 1990, cited in Chambers, 2019). Chambers (2019), from his analysis of Freire's position, states that philosophically he supported "teacher

directiveness” (p. 23) and saw this, alongside “dialogue” as being congruent with his problem-posing model could coexist and were able to form the classroom day-to-day educational experience (p.23). Biesta, (2017), also argued that teaching is an essential ingredient for emancipatory education.

Another key theme, interwoven throughout Freire’s work is the concept of Praxis, where the blending of theory and practice come together, each informing one another “in dialogue in order to gain knowledge of their social reality” (Freire, 1970, p.69). Important for him was the ability for individuals to reflect on their reality and he considered through concerted action this would lead to them being able to transform their situations. This view is relevant to social work, its development as a discipline, it addresses theory and practice in social work, self-development of the social worker as a professional, and engagement with individuals to change their circumstances.

Problem-posing pedagogy is based on communication and dialogue (Freire, 1970, p.57). A tenet of Freire’s belief was that by adopting this route was to shift towards “fostering human freedom” which was achieved by enabling a dialectical relationship between teacher and student to develop where they worked in partnership to resolve issues. The opportunity for dialogue within learning, pre- and at post-qualifying stages of social work education and training is essential. Intervening it into learning can offer social workers an opportunity to articulate their views, test out their ideas, constructively challenged in a safe environment can enable them to grow in confidence in their skills and knowledge, as well as critically evaluate their practice, as well as learn from their peers, thus providing a ‘bottom-up approach’, providing an opportunity for a problem-solving style of learning, which correlates with Freire’s approach, and is emancipatory in its approach (Higham, 2006).

This approach correlates with social work practice as it is a relationship-based profession (Howe 1998; Trevithick 2003; Ruch, Turney and Ward, 2010; Bryn, Hingley-Jones and Ruch, 2016) so there is a need for social work practitioners to develop core skills, such as listening, engagement, empathy, reflecting, and

adherence to social work values and ethics that underpin practice (GSCC, 2002, HCPC, 2012a, SWE, 2019) in order to effectively engage with service users. Social work practice takes place within a variety of arenas, such as individual casework, group work or community work, and is essentially about the potential for change, as well as the empowerment of individuals to address issues they face and provide them with an opportunity to understand the barriers that have led to their situations and equip them with the knowledge and skills to take control over their own lives (Biestek, 1961). The importance of a problem-solving approach is also recognized when writing about social work practice theories, Payne (2014, cited in Cox, Cleak, Bhathal and Brophy, 2020) considers these are informed by three areas "political, philosophy and dominant welfare discourses and theories of the client world" (p.3). In social work education, dialogic and student-centred learning methods are used to maximise students' learning and participation to become competent practitioners (Teater, 2010). Social work programmes use a variety of approaches to learning, including lectures, seminars, in-class/peer discussions, group assignments, vignettes, simulations, case study scenarios, drawing on real life experiences to develop these skills and awareness of using themselves as a resource, particularly as self is key to developing a therapeutic relationship, which is seen as the cornerstone of change (Cooper, 2017; Trevithick, 2017).

The experiences of service user and carers should be pivotal in shaping the social work education to ensure it is person-centred in its delivery (Knowles, 1984). Aldred and Aldred (1998) noted that problem-based learning offers a more effective way of learning as this leads to greater retention of course material, student coherence, and self-discovery of knowledge (Saleebey and Scanlon, 2005). The method translates to social work models, such as solution focused or task-centred social work practice, to engage service users in the process of change. Professional learning, at pre-qualifying and post-qualifying levels, use dialogue as a central vehicle for learning around practice issues, including approaches within the workplace, such as peer discussions on cases, mentoring by more experienced workers, as well as more formal approaches such as workshops, study days, conference attendance (Knight, Tait and Yorke, 2006).The pedagogical approach promoted by Freire, that encourages questioning and identifying problems to be solved, aims to stimulate

dialogue, critical thinking and reflection of the individual (Higham,2006), which are core skills that are essential tools and requirements of social work practice and enshrined in Domain 6 of the Professional Capabilities Framework (BASW, 2018).

3.3.3 Conscientization

Another key theme developed by Freire, that links to praxis, and problem-posing pedagogy, and is central to social work education is conscientization, with the goal of individuals to attain “critical consciousness” (Freire 1970). However, when Freire was writing about this concept it was considered “radical, subversive and dangerous” and his views and stance led to him being exiled from Brazil in 1964, a fate lasting for over fifteen years (Darder, 2018). The shift to conscientization, connects to critical reflection, increasingly important part of social work practice and seen by some authors (e.g. Wilson and Kelly, 2010, cited in Halton, Powell, and Scanlon, 2015) as ‘a way of countering the managerialist, competence-based approaches to social work practice’ (p.26). Its objective is to enable students move towards “cultural consciousness” (Freire, 1970, p.7). The longer-term goal is for students to move forward to achieve “centrality of critical reflection on practice” (Beaumont and Cemlyn, 2005, p.43, cited in Burgess and Taylor, 2005). When faced with conflicts and dilemmas it is essential that practitioners, when working with individuals who have experienced difficulties in their lives, consider these areas from multiple perspectives in order to find solutions to empower service users (Glaister, 2008).

Reflective practice is not a new element in social work practice or allied professions and initially developed by educational philosopher such as John Dewey (1910) as well as social work being highly influenced by Schön (1983, 1991). Over the years, the development of critical reflective has continued to be influenced by the work of Freire (1996), Fook (2000, 2007) Argyris (2004), and Brookfield (2009), to name a few, all of whom have written extensively about its importance to practice development. Reflective and reflexive approaches to pedagogy advocated by Freire (1970) and Fromm (1976) are central to effective social work practice.

Reflecting on Freire's concepts and where they sit with my research regarding social work and continuing professional development, there are several connections. For instance, the problem-posing approach also indicates that as students integrate the approach, they take more responsibility for their own learning to become more autonomous. This is a requirement in social work education, from the prequalifying stage to continuing professional development, and an essential ingredient to become an effective practitioner (PCF, 2018; SWE, 2019b). Neo-liberal ideological principles and managerialism introduced into the public sector, has been further entrenched since the financial crash in 2008, leading to austerity, reduced resources, and evidence of increased poverty (Ferguson, 2008; Rogowski, 2010; 2020; Bamford, 2015; 2020; Lavalette, 2019). Whist the overall objective is a workforce of practising autonomous social workers, evidence suggests this shift has led to deskilling of social workers in their practice due to a tighter grip of managerial control (Dominelli, 1996; PCF, 2018; SWE, 2019; Lavalette, 2019).

3.4 Theoretical Perspectives of Fromm

The next discussion in this section of the theoretical framework review focuses on the twentieth century influential theorist Erich Fromm, a German-born Jewish psychologist, sociologist, psychotherapist, and philosopher. The section will be drawing on *To Have or To Be*, which was written "in the spirit of humanism" (Fromm, 1979, p.9) and draws on themes, for example humanisation, materialism, alienation, struggles, freedom, individual and self. I will draw on some of these to illustrate points regarding social work practice issues and relevance to CPD.

3.4.1 Overview

Fromm wrote a large body of books that aid practitioners' understanding of the human development, social problems and psychological issues that impact on individuals. While Fromm is not one of the major theorists used in social work theory, his theoretical concepts and ideas connect to a range of issues faced by individuals (service users) and are relevant to social workers in their practice. Key to Fromm's work was his commitment to exemplify the complexity of the relationship between the fast pace changing needs of industrial, capitalist society and the individual, whom he considered to be poorly equipped to adapt from their previous organic natural

environment (1976 cited in Darder, 2018). Fromm (1976) argued that social work theory and practice draw heavily on the social sciences to understand and inform practice, for instance, sociological perspectives such as socialisation, society, social structures, role theory, identity, and deviancy, all explain how these impact on individuals' lives. Equally, psychological theories aid understanding of human growth, and development of individuals, the life span stages, as well as understanding psychological and social processes that affect individual and group functioning and whether any social work assessment requires or warrants intervention. Fromm's (1976) insights are invaluable, especially when critically reflecting on complex cases in the field of practice, such as mental health, criminological or childcare practice. Freire (1970,1972) records that he found Fromm's ideas and approach to issues influential, with both specifically sharing interests in areas, such as critical social theory, the oppressed/oppressor dyad, humanisation and achieving self-determination through liberation (Darder, 2018).

3.4.2 Modes of Existence

Fromm (1976) distinguishes between two modes of existence, having and being. His ideas have relevance today in social work practice and CPD, especially the shift to neoliberal state and marketisation of higher education (HE) in the UK. Molesworth, Nixon, and Scullion (2009) argue that the business model, with its focus on market-led approaches where the student becomes a customer, runs the risk of changes in pedagogical and academic approaches, leading to decreasing intellectual academic approaches and challenges inherent in university education in favour of more workplace vocational approaches. The approach risks creating students who have to "have a degree," rather than "be learners" (2009, p.277). Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion (2009) were critical of the consumer model approach considering this could have implications and limit the transformation of a student to become scholars (p.277).

3.4.3 Having Mode

Fromm's (1976) analysis of contemporary capitalist societies highlights that in the 'having' mode of existence, there has been a shift towards individualism and consumerism. Here there is an emphasis on ownership, possession, exclusivity, and

domination, with the latter leading to oppression towards others (Freire, 1970; Dominelli, 2002; 2008; Tedam, 2024). Fromm's work also explores the social and personal character of individuals, their personalities and motivations, drawing on the work of Freud's theory of social psychology, and sees individuals as products of their environment (Fromm, 1947 cited in St. Jean, 2016).The characteristics of social workers are an important consideration, with socialisation taking place in prequalifying education and training in social work, where integration of social work values and professional identity being formed. These attributes are key to the role, crucial to developing appropriate relationships with service users and interacting in a way that is empowering, leading to emancipation of the service user. Whereas the having mode is based on oppressiveness, it gets in the way of self, truth, transformation, and results in citizenship becoming consumption (Thomas, 2018). The having mode and negative characteristics are detrimental in social work practice.

3.4.4 Being Mode

To attain the being mode existence is, according to Barnett, not an easy task and "the transition towards a being mode can be an uncomfortable experience" (Barnett, 1997, 2004, cited in Molesworth, *et al.,* 2009, p.283). Barnett further proffers that "education should disturb human 'being' in order to prepare students to cope and thrive in a world of increasing complexity" (cited in Molesworth, *et al.,* 2009, p.283). The being mode is based on social workers having access to a learning environment culture, which encourages peer learning, critical reflection, professional curiosity, and driven by social work values, with the goal to help service users improve their lives (St. Jean, 2016, p.257). These opportunities encourage self-awareness and self-growth, which accords with Fromm's (1976) perspective of being. The process of theoretical learning starts during prequalifying education and training at university and then further built on through practice and critical reflective process during supervision at post-qualifying and continuing professional development (BASW, 2018, PCF, Domain 6, SWE, 2019, standard 4).

The social work context, policy and practice are largely defined and operate within parameters set by the state and employers within England, with little individual choice

over post qualifying education and training or within practice for creativity. However, despite this situation, according to the Knowledge and Skills Statement for Social Workers in Adult Services (DoH, 2015), there is some room for manoeuvre to step outside this frame. This document highlights an aspiration that by the end of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) that personal development should include "…professional use of self, using interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence…apply imagination, creativity and curiosity," to practice (DoH, 2015, p.5; Thomas, 2018).

Despite this potential, Molesworth, Nixon, and Scullion (2009) argue that the business model, with its focus on market-led approaches where the student becomes a customer, runs the risk of changes in pedagogical and academic approaches, leading to decreasing intellectual academic approaches and challenges inherent in university education in favour of more workplace vocational approaches. The approach risks creating students who have to "have a degree," rather than "be learners" (p.277). Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion (2009) were critical of the consumer model approach considering this could have implications and limit the transformation of a student to become scholars.

3.5 Power, Knowledge, and Risk

Before moving onto discuss Foucault's perspective and relevance to my research, this section will provide an overview of the theoretical constructs of power, knowledge and risk perspectives from an historical angle drawing on the sociological writers, Marx, Weber, and Parsons. This will be followed by a brief synopsis of two contemporary contributors, Lukes and Giddens, before moving on to discuss in more depth the work of Foucault's theoretical constructs and how analysing his theories aid understanding of social work practice. Power, knowledge and risk are central to social work and the theorists I have chosen provide insights about how education and learning can be used to cement, or challenge, power dynamics, privileging some kinds of knowledge over others. Risk, risk assessment, and risk management are core practice issues relevant to all areas of social work practice and, it is essential that practitioners have high level skills in the risk assessment process (SCIE, 2023).

Firstly, power is a central sociological concept that has been debated historically by foundational theorists of Western sociology, including, for instance Marx (1818-1883), Weber (1864-1920) Parsons (1902-1979), all of whom have played a significant role in the debate. For example, Marxism locates the control of power to the bourgeoisie via the state and economy, who use this to further their own interests that are in direct conflict with those subjected to power, the proletariat. Whereas, for Weber he views three types of legitimate rule that have been legitimised by leaders: traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational. Also woven into his perspective are notions of individuality and ability to exercise of free will, pertinent to current societal thinking and important considerations in social work practice. However, Parsons looked at power from a distinct perspective putting forth that it could be a "countervailing force that could act as a guarantor of social cohesion, moderating and channelling the exercise of individualised *power to*." He saw 'power as the "generalized capacity of a social system to get things done in the interest of collective goals" (Parsons, 1960, p.181 cited in Tew, 2006, p.35), arguing that it was fluid, and not all about domination and social coercion. He did not see power as individual or resting with the elite but spanning society as a whole.

The contemporary political scientist Lukes (2005), saw the concept of power as strongly contested, with "no agreement about how to define it" (p.61). This, in his view, led to conflicting and competing definitions, with power requiring a broad definition. Lukes' theory saw power being exercised through, what he described three "faces" or types (decision-making, non-decision making power and ideological power) which he linked to divergent functions within society (Lukes, 2005).

Whereas Giddens (1994), on the other hand, sees certain groups that through having more opportunities to gain more authoritative resources that leads to them gaining more privileged access. These dominant and superior positions enable them to exercise more power over other groups, especially if they "label others" as inferior and legitimate the exercise of *power over* them' *(*Dominelli, 2002, p.18, cited in Tew, 2006, p.36).

The theorists' perspective on power are important concepts for social workers to understand to undertake their role, in whichever area they practice. Power is a central feature of the client/service users /social worker relationship and can be contentious especially in roles where social workers are agents of the state and exercising these roles in areas, such as child protection, mental health, criminal justice (Children Act, 1989; Mental Health Act, 1959,1983 s. 2 & s.3) or evaluating risk or risk management. This has led to negative criticism of social workers' role and practice claiming that they are "intrusive, busybodies, bureaucrats" (Brewer and Lait, 1980). Others see the profession "as benevolent" (Epstein,1998, p.3), or when carrying out a generalist approach covering various tasks, attributing these as being "caring, treating, and protecting" (Epstein, 1998, p.3). Although whatever function is being undertaken social work is underpinned by ethics, values, social justice, and human rights and it is essential for practitioners to practise in an anti-discriminatory and empowering way (Thompson, 1992, 2005, 2020; Dalrymple and Burke, 2006; Tew, 2006; Banks, 2012; SWE, 2019; BASW, 2021).

Powell (2019) when researching state and social care for older people, expressed that the term governmentality provided "a theoretical framework through which to view policy and practice that is largely governed by discourses of personalisation, safeguarding, capability and risk" (Powell, 2019, p.15). Risk by, and to whom, is not a new phenomenon in social work practice and the concept of assessment and management of risk has increased since the shift by the New Right from a welfare state provision to Neo-Liberalism with more focus on a 'risk society' (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1998; Bauman, 2017).This is applied across a range of service user pathways, for instance, children and families, mental health, adult services, youth services and probation. Increasingly since the 1970s there have been a plethora of authors on risk and its management, such as Prins (1975), Beck (1992), Parton (1996), Munro (1996,1999), Kemshall and Pritchard (1996), Giddens (1998), Kemshall (200, 2010), Clapton, Cree and Smith (2013) and Bauman (2017), all contributing to the debate. There is the idea that society is now organised around anticipation and management of risk, which is a key starting point for social work practice. Assessment of risk and managing these areas are main pillars of professional social work practice (Kemshall and Pritchard, 1996; Parton, 2011;

Munro, 2011; Seden, 2016). Risk assessment is a continuous process and it is essential that social work practitioners develop knowledge and skills to assess 'risk of harm,' as well as devising effective procedures to manage these in relation to service users, as well as ensure public protection (Kemshall and Maguire, 2006; SWE, 2019).These attributes need to be built on in practice and can be attained and enhanced through CPD.

3.6 Theoretical Perspectives of Foucault

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) a leading, influential, though controversial social theorist of the 20th century. Foucault contributed to political thought through his work as a philosopher, historian, political activist, and campaigner. His theoretical constructs and writings are pertinent to issues of a variety of professions and organisations and provide insight into issues affecting social work today in the 21st century.

I will be focusing on reviewing the constructs of power/knowledge, governmentality, panopticon/surveillance, discipline, punishment, and technologies of self, but refer to others in the analysis of my findings and discussions section.

3.6.1 Power

Foucault has been highly influential in constructing understanding about power and how it is used in and across society. His work and ideas are key to contemporary social work practice that operates within government policies that influence changing government ideology and political perspectives. Foucault takes on a distinct perspective of power from other major theorists who see it in terms of being coercive or repressive and has an influence on actions. He sees it as a "necessary, productive and positive force in society" (Chambon and Wang, 1998; Gaventa, 2003, p.2). He does not see power as an individual character or one that is possessed, or existing in either social structures or institutions (Foucault 1988b cited in Chambon, Irving and Epstein, 1999). Foucault's analysis of power is relational, with it permeating every relationship and composed through different forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and of regimes of 'truth' (Rabinow,1984; Foucault, 1991).

Foucault maintains that “power is everywhere and comes from everywhere” (Foucault 1998, p.63) and challenging that power was exerted by a small group of powerful people who dominated and coerced people but saw it as dispersed and pervasive. Foucault did not see power as necessarily negative, repressive, and dominating but could be a productive, positive effect on individuals (Gaventa, 2003) as well as normalising. Additionally, Foucault argued that “as well as a creative force it is underpinned by “resistance’ practices” (Foucault,1977 cited in Gilbert and Powell, 2010, p.4). A central feature of Foucault’s belief is that power and knowledge are inextricably linked; they function together to create a system of control and rely on the production of knowledge to maintain powerful positions of authority. On the other hand, taking a Foucauldian approach Gilbert and Powell (2010) stress it is important to “not content to take appearance at face value and so it challenges and reconstructs professional assumptions” (p.17).This perspective correlates with the social workers task, discussed earlier, to dissect information and challenge assumptions to seek truth (Berger and Luckmann,1966). They cite the importance of clarifying “presuppositions that are embedded in worldviews of social workers” (p.17). Alongside this it is equally important for social workers to have a clear understanding of power dynamics in their interventions with service users and to encourage them to be involved in decision-making on aspects affecting their lives (de Moll,2010).This equates with both the person-centred and relationship-based models of social work practice, as well as working in an empowering and anti-discriminatory way (Rogers, 1963; Thompson, 1992, 2020); Pierson, 2003; Ruch, 2005; Beresford, Croft and Adshead, 2008; Tedam 2021). However, Foucault’s (1976) idea that power and resistance are everywhere can easily be misinterpreted to suggest that power dynamics are more equal than they are in reality. Social workers are delegated and exercise power in their role, it is in their DNA and servicer users’ attempts to exercise their own power are often dismissed as lack of engagement, lack of insight, or lack of capacity or non-compliance; their role and institutional power assigned to them leaves them at an impregnable hierarchy with service users’ lived experiences.

3.6.2 Governmentality

This section starts the focus on Foucault's contribution of governmentality especially its link to the analysis of power (Lemke, 2010). Foucault's work traced the governing of populations from the 16th century in France to 1980s in Western societies. Foucault's lectures in late 1978/1979 focused on "genealogy of the modern state" (1978), with him later devising the term governmentality. In brief, Foucault expanded the view of the historical view of the state, which included the political sphere, but also included perspectives on everyday life and how it affected the population. Rose (1999), in his analysis of governmentality, explained that it required a focus "on the processes, techniques, and procedures that produce the moral regulation of the choices of autonomous individuals" (cited in Powell and Khan, 2012). Whereas Chambon and Wang (1999) point out Foucault's concept of governmentality "expands the realm of what is seen as political, or state power, to encompass a wide range of everyday practices that are not generally thought of in this manner" (p.275). Foucault's work is linked to neo-liberal forms of government, operating both within the state and other non-statutory organisations, which are often reliant on state funding. Gilbert and Powell (2010) point out that in England since the start of 21st century there has been the introduction of numerous restructured policy frameworks that affect children and adults but also impact on social work, social care, education, and health. Although these have been introduced under the guise of encouraging "Well-Being" initiatives, whilst in fact this is a shift to responsibilisation of citizens (Rose, 1996a; O'Malley, 2009; Peeters, 2019).

According to Rose (1999) if a neo-liberal government is to fully realize its goals, individuals must come to recognize and "act upon themselves as both free and responsible" (p.68). Accordingly, neo-liberalism must work to create the social reality that it proposes already exists. For as Lemke (2001) states, "political rationality is not pure, neutral knowledge that simply 're-presents' the governing reality" (p.191) instead, neo-liberalism constitutes an attempt to link a reduction in state welfare services and security systems to the increasing call for subjects to become free, enterprising, autonomous individuals. It can then begin to govern its subjects, not through intrusive state bureaucracies backed with legal powers, the imposition of

moral standards under a religious mandate, but through structuring the possible field of action in which they (citizens) govern themselves, through their freedom. Through the transformation of subjects with duties and obligations, into individuals, with rights and freedoms, modern individuals are not merely “free to choose” but obliged to be free, "to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice" (Rose, 1999, p.87) and through choice reshaping the way a person conducts their lives. As previously indicated neo-liberal principles and managerialism that have been imposed on social workers especially the political influence on social work educational programmes, run the risk of social workers being expected to “practise increasingly in a standardised and punitive manner” and “become tools of the neoliberal state” (Cummins, 2018, cited by Darroch, 2019). It is also important to recognise that due to effects of austerity and lack of available relevant resources social workers are involved in imposing access on service users, which links to Cummins (2018) analysis above. To challenge this type of social work it is important that social workers are able to access a wide range of CPD that is open, challenging, and not confined to the narrow field of statutory learning, although from a governmentality perspective this may be difficult to achieve. The concept of governmentality, where social workers act as agents of state control by encouraging individuals to “self-regulate” their behaviour and fit in with societal norms is not infallible, as there are notable limitations in everyday practice.

3.6.3 Surveillance

A central theme of Foucault (1977) has been his work on surveillance and discipline, exercised through power. As society has advanced, social work practice, and the environment in which it operates, has been shaped by the introduction of information communications technologies (ICT) to monitor the various tasks and activities. This, alongside the shift to managerialism operated in a neo-liberal climate, has led to increased scrutiny and surveillance of practice, for example, assessments, more protocolisation of work, interactions, and decision-making. Beddoe (2010), commenting that the “risk society” has led to greater increase in regulation within social work and surveillance. Similarly on this theme, Andersson (2008) points out that through the increased scrutiny social workers’ practice is in a “state of surveillance, which is an exercise of power” (p.127). He views surveillance as a

central technique that renders an individual the object of power/knowledge. Andersson (2008) depicts this by reference to Bentham's Panopticon (1791), which has a central viewpoint from where prisoners can be observed by officials, though due to its positioning, it is not possible for them to be aware of whether or not are being observed at any given moment. Foucault maintains that the panopticon is an integration "of power and knowledge" (Gilbert and Powell, 2010, p.17). but significantly it is "control of the body and control of space into a technology of discipline" (p.17). This leads to a gaze that is "always receptive" to managerial control catches all (Foucault, 1977, p.89; cited in Gilbert and Powell, 2010 p.14). Foucault's views correlate with the contemporary social work practice and aid understanding of the reality in which social workers currently operate, such as modern technological facilities, e.g. zoom, social media, Facebook, AI (Turner, 2019; Cooner, Beddoe, Ferguson and Joy, 2020).

3.6.4 Docile Bodies

Foucault's describes a body as "docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved" (Foucault, 1977, p.136). Docility occurs when a group of people are so used to being watched continuously that their discipline becomes internalised, and they no longer have the capacity to resist. When people enter this state, they become docile bodies. The group often perceives they are under constant surveillance and that others can exert power over them without taking as much action (Foucault, 1977. 1991). The more powerful controlling group makes harsh and public examples of those who are caught acting out. Surveillance and docility are interlinked.

As a profession social workers face intense scrutiny from a number of angles, such as organisation, government, media, and Parliament. At a micro-level, individual social workers are monitored by line managers, senior colleagues, local and national politicians, as well as by the courts, Social Work England (particularly around CPD and professional standards) and, increasingly by service users, carers, and their representatives.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored and applied the work of four philosophical theorists, Mills, Freire, Fromm, and Foucault to the research field of CPD and social work. The chapter appraises these and uses research to illustrate their perspectives and make links to issues that social workers face in their everyday practice. Their work and perspective provide a series of lenses that I will be using to interpret my findings. Additionally, the chapter provides a section on the theoretical and practical implications of risk, risk assessment, and management as these are core to social work practice across all sectors (SWE,2019).These theoretical perspectives illuminate CPD, not simply as a set of initiatives and practices geared towards improving practice, but as a contested and highly political field that sheds light on the role of social work as a profession and the demands on individual practitioners.

Having established the theoretical framework for the study, the next chapter will set out the rationale for the research design, selection of methods, data analysis process, ethical considerations, positionality and strengths and limitations of the research process.

Chapter Four: Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

As chapter two indicates, social work education and training is a complex area of professional practice, especially its history of uncertainty, with shifting identities (Lorenz, 1994) operating in a global arena. Its status as an academic discipline has been questioned (Camilleri, 1999; Maylea, 2021; Garrett, 2021a) by the changing context and political ideologies of successive governments and this has led to considerable challenges and upheaval in education and training delivery, which has affected confidence and moral of practitioners. Alongside these transitions social workers have faced challenges to maintain and remain true to the underpinning core social work values of social work in order to focus on its core tasks of working with vulnerable individuals who are facing crises at different points in their lives, as well as retain their professional identity (Lovelock, and Lyons, and Powell, 2004).

In the previous chapter three I set out my analysis of four core influential twentieth century philosophical thinkers, Mills (1959), Freire (1970), Fromm (1976), and Foucault (1977), and explore where their themes and ideas connect to contemporary social work and continuing professional development. The section provides the underpinning theoretical framework for my research.

In this chapter I outline the research strategy to answer the substantive and supplementary research questions posed in the introductory chapter one. Crotty (1998) acknowledges that this is not an easy task. Initially the chapter will focus on two specific areas, firstly, what methodologies and methods are selected, and secondly how they are used (Crotty,1998). He argues that there are “four elements that underpin the social research process which are: epistemology, theoretical perspectives, methodologies” (p.4) and methods, each of the elements informing one another. Crotty (1998) goes onto say that the majority of discussions in literature incorporate these four elements, although he is critical of lack of exploration of the

terms individually, commenting “that forms of these different process elements are thrown together in a grab-bag style as if they were all comparable terms” (p.3). The chapter will initially give a brief history and overview of methodological approaches and the major influences within the research field before exploring in more depth methodologies and methods I considered and then employed. Notably the discussion will include a debate about the ontological and epistemological before moving onto the other elements and research design.

4.2 Methodology

Research methodology that influences social science and educational research has its roots primarily in the late 18th century and 19th century with sociologists such as Auguste Comte (1798-1857), Karl Marx (1818-1853); Max Weber (1864-1920 and Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), playing influential roles by laying the scientific foundations and principles that remain influential. Over time however, educational research has shifted away from two, dominant, methodological approaches that concentrated primarily on disciplines such as “psychology, sociology, philosophy and history” (Hammersley, 2014, cited in BERA, 2014, p.1) to developing a range of methodological approaches to research more diverse and complex areas. To deal with the methodological diversity of the area to be studied Hammersley (2014) directs us to competing paradigms, which sets the research in context, the purpose, and parameters, which he describes as “exemplar or model” (Hammersley, 2014 cited in BERA, 2018, p.2; BERA, 2024).

Deciding on theoretical perspectives, including the choice of the research paradigms that you will be using to undertake for the research, is a key task and these choices can appear perplexing (Agee, 2009). However, paradigms are important as they set the scene of how the researcher will undertake their research in terms of selection of the strategies and their appropriateness. The selection of the paradigm is contingent on the ontological and epistemological position the researcher takes.

An influential contributor to the development of research methodology, Thomas Kuhn, an historian of science and scientist, drew on the work of Aristotle, especially his contribution to the understanding of the physical world whilst acknowledging difficulties in applying this to natural world. His philosophical ideas about how scientific methods ought to develop were important as at that time they were dominated by those scientists working in the field (Naughton, 2012). The publication of Kuhn's book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in 1962, was highly influential as it reviewed how history, from different perspectives, which contributed to a greater understanding of the natural world. This publication challenges Whiggish historicist framings of research as a means to progression as leading to what Butterfield (1931, p.1; 1963) writes "greater liberty and enlightenment, culminating in modern forms of liberal democracy and constitutional monarchy" with Kuhn's work stressing "the social character of natural science research" (Hammersley, 2012, p.5). Bryman (2011) comments that the term paradigm derives from a scientific background "where it was used to describe a cluster of beliefs and dictates that for sciences in a particular discipline influence what should be studied" (Bryman, 2011, p.714). Paradigms are defined as patterns, models, or exemplars.

In this next section I propose to discuss two key conceptual terms, ontology, and epistemology, and explore how their philosophical positions have shaped my thinking and are central to consideration of methodological choice and choice of paradigm that fits my research. This will be followed by an overview of different Paradigms and their relevance to this study.

4.2.1 Ontological and Epistemological positions

4.2.2 Ontology

Crotty (1998, p.10) suggests "ontology is the study of being", with Plummer (2010) suggesting that a "philosopher's mind" (p.22) is required in order to explore profound issues around ontology acknowledging that researching human beings, is not an easy task as they are unique and complex. Richards (2003) goes further referring to ontology as "the nature of our beliefs about reality" (Richards, 2003, p.33 cited in

Rehman and Alharthi, 2016), with Rehman and Alharthi (2016) commenting that researchers use ontological questions to probe what type of reality exists.
Exploring this further, Cohen Manion and Morrison (2007) consider ontology from three different assumptions about nature or meaning of social phenomena which is being investigated. Firstly, they debate at some length whether social reality is external to individuals, is it objective - 'out there in the world'? or is it the product of individual perception? They also query whether this is formulated within one's mind. One of the focuses of this thesis is whose choice is CPD? The framing of the question acknowledges that there are competing positions, framings, and subjectivities around CPD in social work.

Secondly, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) referred to assumptions which are described by Burrell and Morgan (1979) as "an epistemological kind". They go on to explore the subject of knowledge, its characteristics, and, importantly, how it is communicated to human beings. They examine this from the angle of the researcher particularly how they (researcher) align their self, positing that this will affect the approach they take to uncovering knowledge of social behaviour (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). For instance, a positivist view would see knowledge as "hard, objective and tangible" whereas taking an anti-positivist or interpretivist view would "see knowledge as personal, subjective and unique" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). In the approach I followed in my own research this was an interpretivist perspective as each of the participants I interviewed concerning how they personally engage in continuing professional development, and its impact responded from their own unique, personal perspective. My aim was to hear their stories first-hand and understand their perspective in a humanising way (Gray, 1998 cited in Bell and Waters, 2018).

The third area of assumptions put forth by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) looks at human nature from two angles, focusing on the relationship between the environment and human beings. One aspect depicts human beings as being products of their environment, and the other exercising free will, thus having control over how to produce their own environments. The contexts lead to opposite visions shaping their lives, one voluntarism and the other determinism (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) and also links to structure and agency continuum.

Bryman (2012) describes ontology as “a theory of the nature of social entities” (p.714), emphasising that the research process is influenced by the assumption taken about the nature of social phenomena. Describing human beings as ‘social actors’ Bryman (2012) takes a similar view as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), in that the social world is seen as something external, over which individuals have no control, and this can also apply when viewing this from how organisational cultures influence and impose behavioural expectations on individuals. This latter view is particularly relevant in terms of my research as continuing professional development for social workers is bound up with negotiating these requirements, but also Social Work England and their requirements that individual social work practitioners provide annually evidence of their engagement in continuing professional development to remain licenced to practice (Social Work England, 2019). However, fulfilling this requirement is contingent on the amount of time, space, and opportunities available to meet this requirement, as well as /or encouraged by the organisations/employers for social workers to fulfil this requirement. This is reinforced by Saleebey and Scanlon (2005) in their paper on critical pedagogy where they highlight external barriers, such as raising a family, coping with general life events, dealing with work pressures, as well as learning and expectations of “reflection, critical analysis and application” (p.11) are considered barriers to learning and meaningful engagement.

Adams (2009), discussing ontology and its connection and influence, particularly to social work education, talks about an ontological uncertainty faced by social work students, but this, in my view, also applies to the more experienced social work practitioner. Social work students and practitioners are required to learn ‘things’ and ‘how to’ knowledge, as well as practice skills, and this challenges our conception of who we are and what we believe in, especially our values. So, ontological uncertainty can present social workers with fundamental challenges because it raises doubts, highlights gaps in our understanding of unfamiliar issues or tasks, debates on which we have not a fixed view, and unresolved emotions. Social work practice requires social workers to work with individuals (service-users/clients), whose situations are personal and unique to them, shifting from personal to societal wider structural and social problems (Mills, 1963). These are challenging and require social workers to draw on an extensive range of knowledge. The need for social workers to address

uncertainty and ambiguity has been emphasised by Parton (1998, 2000). As well as Fook (2000) across the spectrum, as well as work in a relationship practice. Social work is bound up with conflicting and competing subjectivities. Therefore, in this context an interpretivist ontology provides a good fit for my research.

4.2.3 Epistemology

Similarly to the debate around what shape and form ontology takes, epistemology, a branch of philosophy, is also subject to debate by many theorists in research design. Hammersley (2012) describes it as a concept, a branch of philosophy that is widely debated when considering research design. It is concerned whether knowledge is possible, questions how knowledge can be gained, and explores whether knowledge has limits. The concept can relate to general knowledge or specific knowledge. However, epistemology as a term is surrounded by debate, with on the one hand with there are those that take a position of scepticism, which Hammersley (2012) refers to as a "radical epistemology view" in that it "questions the very possibility of knowledge" (BERA, 2012, Appendix 2). Whereas Richards (2003) maintains that epistemology "is based on an assumption we make about the kind or the nature of knowledge" (p.2) or how to find out about the world (Snape and Spencer, 2003).

Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge itself and the relationship between the inquirer and the known. This puts under scrutiny questions pertaining to whether knowledge is a set of value-free truths, transcending opinion, or whether it is subjectively built and progressively understood, through experience. Epistemology asks: What is knowledge? How is it acquired? And what do people know? The abilities to describe what something is, why something exists, and how something works, represent some of the different forms of knowledge.

Bryman (2012) in his discussion about the research process points out that there is a core of researchers who believe that research can only be undertaken using a "scientific approach" (p.6) and should follow a set procedure, such as formulating a hypothesis and testing this against a set measurement. Bryman (2012) points out

that whilst this is a scientific view, this is not a comprehensive view held by social scientists who cast doubts on whether the approach would deal with the subjective and sensitive material that different methodology seeks to explore. Raising these points are epistemological questions. Burnell and Morgan (1979) emphasise that the beliefs and assumptions we make about knowledge and what constitutes acceptable, valid and legitimate knowledge are epistemological concerns and have fundamental implications for the whole research design and consequently for the knowledge that researchers contribute to their field (Burnell and Morgan, 1979).

4.3 Positionality

There is no shortage of authors in the field of research describing positionality as a term and the importance of its inclusion when writing up a research paper. The term is described as: “an individual’s world view and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context” (Foote and Bartell, 2011; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; and Rowe, 2014 cited in Holmes, 2020 p.1). It links to the researcher’s assumptions, it is dynamic, not static and changes back and forth as the researcher’s personal, political, and professional concerns and meanings change position (Holmes, 2020). The position a researcher takes is influenced by their beliefs and values, which are shaped by their own background, status, social class, gender, ethnicity, race, religious faith, profession, political views, culture, and interests. All these areas have a bearing on the researcher’s choice of research study, the selection of participants, and the context and choice of methodology they make (Holmes, 2020). Positionality is not an isolated position in research but brought to the fore through the process of reflection and reflexivity that needs to be an active process throughout the research process. In the next phase I will address this area and my adopted position.

My background is originally from a middle-class family, brought up from the age of ten by a widowed mother, who returned to her nursing career at a time the welfare state was just commencing. I am white, married with adult children. In my final years in secondary education, I was encouraged to take a commerce pathway, primarily to facilitate a career, and was fortunate to enjoy the subjects and achieve high grades.

My qualifications enabled me to commence my initial career in the dual role of personal secretary and bookkeeper, where I was responsible for managing the wages' section for over three hundred workers in a blue-chip company. I had planned to continue with the accountancy examinations to become a qualified accountant but did not follow this option following marriage and a period at home caring for my children, during which time I was also involved in voluntary organisations, mostly focusing on children and families. It was here I became more aware and interested in social issues, particularly poverty, inequality and social exclusion which were prevalent in rural areas. On returning to work I first worked in an educational establishment, before moving on to the Probation Service as a personal assistant in a Probation Office and through the experience there of being in front line work moved to a local authority as a social work assistant. This enabled me to gain access to a CQSW programme where I trained as a Probation Officer. On qualification I started a generic Probation Officer post and was exposed to a variety of work with individuals, primarily offenders (then called clients), as well as Court Welfare that worked with divorcing and separating parents in dispute about their children, as well as adoption and High Court Wardships. After some years I moved onto various specialist roles associated with children and family social work, for instance, Guardian ad Litem, Children's Guardian, Independent Social Worker. I was a Practice Teacher and then started a part-time position working as an Associate Lecturer, which I found an inspiring and rewarding experience. In the early 1990s I was seconded to a part-time joint post on a prequalifying DipSW social work course and then moved on to a full-time position. Since that time, I have been teaching in higher education on pre- and post-qualifying social work education programmes alongside my role as Independent Social Worker employed by the courts working in public law. Whilst undertaking my PhD doctoral journey I continued in a part-dual role as University Lecturer and Independent Social Worker until I retired from these roles a couple of years ago. These positions have been rewarding and have enabled me to have a good understanding of the policy and political arena in which social work has operated over the past forty years, the challenges and changes facing social workers that have kept me anchored in practice and remain a registered social worker.

Through working with service users and students from diverse backgrounds this has enabled me to be aware of poverty and inequalities, and the struggles faced by many through their lived experiences. My social work training and continuous professional development, casework and roles have heightened my awareness of areas of social and personal issues affecting people in their everyday lives. To work effectively and empathetically I have drawn on social work values, as well as my strong belief in social justice, which should be attainable by all individuals. Throughout I have continued to develop my knowledge through reading and continuing my professional development about various aspects of social work, political policies and how they impact on individuals both within the UK and globally. This includes awareness of the intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) and the interconnectedness of areas such as gender, class, race, sexuality and how prejudice and stigmatisation affect and shape individuals' opportunities and life experiences. I have been able to draw on this knowledge to critically evaluate and interrogate my research and integrate into my research.

The summary above, my teaching, research, and awareness of how policy decision-making by parties of various political persuasion and ideological stances impact on social work practice, and citizens lives, as well as the effects of austerity that has curbed funding to local government and, furthermore, lessened funding and access to support practitioners with continuing professional development. This has been one of the main drivers for conducting this research especially to explore what is delivered, how it meets individual practitioners' learning and development needs, and who has the power to provide and make those choices. Another driver for undertaking this PhD has been to explore these areas with those it affects (social workers) and, consequently, raise its public profile. It is an area that should be central stage in the field of social work, especially in light of the ongoing crisis of recruitment and retention of practitioners, a long-term, largely unaddressed issue, as well as inequalities in recruitment and funding of the workforce. Pre-qualifying social work education, in my view, should be the starting point for the profession and there needs to be a shift to the personal and career development of social workers to ensure they are highly skilled. The research indicates that the majority are keen to develop their skills and knowledge and particularly interested in undertaking therapeutic work in different

areas and models of practice. I picked up a resentment by many of the participants that this work is being outsourced to outside agencies, which impacts significantly on service users' well-being, as well as social workers roles becoming merely functional and technocratic, rather than being in a position to offer holistic and relationship-based interventions. My aim for my research was to provide a platform where participant practitioners' voices could be listened to and heard, rather than dismissed and marginalised (Gordon, 2018; Astvik, Welander & Hellgren, 2021). Finally, my research study is self-funded.

4.3.1 Insider – Outsider Researcher

Social work research takes place in a variety of different settings, each with their own challenges that are unique to that particular context, that also inevitably has an influential bearing on its process (Houston, 2010; Longhofer & Floersch,2012, cited in Sapiro & Matthews, 2020). Conducting research in these settings poses a challenge for participant interviewees, as well as the researcher, specifically if they are practitioner-researchers with experience of working, or being involved, in diverse social work settings they are researching.

4.3.2 Insider-Outsider Roles

The debate concerning insider/outsider researchers, according to Griffith (1998), has been a familiar feature in sociological literature for many decades. An insider researcher has been defined as one "with shared lived experience, tacit knowledge, and a high degree of familiarity with the people they study" (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 657, cited in Sapiro & Matthews, 2020). Whereas those without knowledge, shared experience or community membership are considered "outside" researchers. The insider researcher is in a unique position of bringing with them lived experience, knowledge, professional understanding of the setting and organisational cultures while the outsider-researcher is generally not familiar with the professional knowledge, setting, or culture.

Although there are many advantages of being an insider-researcher there is also the risk that of a researcher being assumed to be more sympathetic that leads to more disclosure. Or, alternatively, participants may consider you have already a firm view before you start the research. Additionally, Berger (2015) considers that the researcher "may risk blurring boundaries or projecting their own beliefs or perceptions onto participants". A dissimilar view is put forth by Tilley (1998) when commenting on the role of insider undertaking research and giving an assurance maintains "will be less hazardous to participants than the research directed by someone stepping in from the outside for a brief encounter" (p.327). Other authors, such as Berger (2015), Collins (2000), Tew *et al.,* (2006 cited in Sapiro and Matthews, 2020) observe that outsider researchers' position may affect their understanding and interpretation of data "through dominant stigmatising discourses" (p.657). Whereas Asselin (2003) takes an alternative view claiming there is more likelihood of outsiders being more objective and approaching the task with "eyes open" (p.100). These views demonstrate that there is no one approach that is considered faultless, each having pros and cons.

4.3.3 Insider Researcher Position

Reflecting on the above observations and my role as insider researcher one, of the advantages was being familiar with the terminology, acronyms, policies etc., of the different social work roles and responsibilities. This proved an advantage particularly in interviews, as well as when I was working on the transcriptions. During the data analysis process it helped with the coding, searching for themes, and interpretation of the data. However, as noted above inside researchers are often criticise for being "too familiar," (Fleming, 2018) and "taking for granted" data, without exploring in more depth. Conversely, an outsider researcher without contextual knowledge would not be in a position to hone in on interesting data, pick up nuances and could perhaps misinterpret data (Fleming, 2018). I was mindful of these points and read and re-read transcripts to check authenticity and validity.

Whist undertaking my doctoral studies and moving onto collecting my empirical research data I was an insider researcher as I was employed in a number of social

work roles, such as University Tutor/Lecturer in social work, where I was involved with undergraduates on pre-qualifying students that involved tutor visits to practice learning placements; as a mentor, assessor and examiner involved with post-graduate students undertaking the Post Graduate Practice Educator Programmes. Additionally, I was a Social Work Expert in Public Law that required me accessing local authorities and voluntary organisations. In terms of knowledge I had access to government policy documents, for instance, Department of Health (DoH) and Department for Education (DfE), as well as organisations associated with social work such as Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), Office for Students (OfS), Social Work England (SWE), British Association of Social Workers (BASW), Local Government Association (LGA) and other professional organisational policy documents that set the context of social work. These various roles and access to documentation enabled me to have a wide and expert knowledge of the educational development and training that social workers undergo. Additionally, it provided me with an in-depth understanding of the various roles and tasks of social work, the underpinning theoretical frameworks, as well as the regulatory framework in which they operate. This experience provided me with a firm foundation and underpinning knowledge bases to engage holistically with my research study. Furthermore, my continued involvement in practice and professional development kept me abreast of current practice issues and enhanced my credibility as a researcher.

As my research participant target group was not confined to one local authority or organisation, I was fortunate that having had a long history of working across a large number of local authorities I was aware of how they were organised in terms of social work pathways, overarching policies, values, and organisational cultures. Additionally, I had social work contacts in the majority through my various roles. Starting from this base enabled me to able to circulate my Research Invitation Flyer (see Appendix 9, p.334) to a number of potential research participants, stressing that there was no obligation or expectation of participation. However, this garnered a positive response from social workers, with many then offering to send it on to other colleagues in their organisations that enabled me to use a snowballing methodology technique (Coleman,1958; Goodman,1961).

4.3.4 Power Relations

The above outline gives an overview of the insider and outsider researcher role and possible advantages and disadvantages. I was conscious however of my current and previous roles, and the issue of power inherent in these and how this could affect the power dynamics of the interviews and interpretation. I was keen to diffuse this and create an environment where participants' voices and perspectives were central stage and heard, without being silenced and marginalised, as literature observes (Gordon, 2018; Astvik, Welander & Hellgren, 2021). Furthermore, I was keen not to encounter professional or personal conflicts that would taint my research.

Reflecting on my role viz a viz the potential participants who had responded to my invitation to participate I was conscious that with some I had had a previous relationship through my various roles. For instance, a number of potential participants had been students, or my tutees on prequalifying social work programmes (a couple over twenty years previously); several I had known when I had been a programme tutor, and more recently I had been a lecturer, programme tutor or post-graduate assessor on courses they attended. A small proportion I knew through my professional role as an independent social work expert and some potential participants were unknown to me. I was aware that holding multiple roles and being an insider researcher could present risks and that it was important to maintain what Green (2014) suggests as a way to address this by keeping an "appropriate degree of both social and emotional distance" (p.9). These areas were addressed through engagement with reflexivity and reflections in my supervision sessions with my two doctoral supervisors who were challenging, interrogating any assumptions and research practice and kept me grounded.

4.3.5 Avoiding Unintentional Bias

Importantly for researchers is that they must be aware that their own personal values and experiences do not influence either the research questions, or how they design and the different methods of data collection (Chavez, 2008). During the various research stages, it is incumbent that researchers take an active role in minimising

possibilities for bias. There are several ways where researchers can encounter bias, for instance through sponsoring, funding, provision of access to resources, including participants (Robson, 2011). Whilst having previous knowledge of research participants and organisations can be beneficial, there is also the potential for bias, particularly with participants wanting to please the researcher that could lead to them giving biased information.

From the outset I acknowledged my positionality in design and implementation of the study. I wanted to avoid bias or be compromised ethically, so clarified parameters and boundaries at the outset. I did this by being clear in my preliminary discussions with potential participants, as well as my written documentation, returning to this to check for any changes at the commencement of the interviews. To check for potential bias at the thematic analysis stage in order to diffuse this I checked, and rechecked the data calculations, reflecting on the data text I had selected to ensure it was capturing and supporting the themes. This was an ongoing process throughout the various analysis stages. Additionally, to avoid bias I also had the benefit throughout my PhD journey of reflecting on different stages of the process within supervision with my doctoral supervisors, which was challenging, and encouraging. Throughout I also received comprehensive reflective feedback on drafts which signposted me to other avenues to enhance my research practice.

4.3.6 Trustworthiness, Credibility, Transparency and Validity

It is important for researchers for their work to be considered trustworthy and legitimised, not only by themselves, but other practitioners, researchers, policy makers and public (Nowell, Norris, White and Moules, 2017). Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that trustworthiness is an important and persuasive factor to research being “worthy of attention” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Nowell *et al.,* 2017). In order to establish trustworthiness, they introduced a set of benchmarks, such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria all need to be in place and evaluated within the research process to ensure they have met the test to achieve trustworthiness.

In order to strive to achieve research that met the above challenges as noted above I used Thematic Analysis (TA) as a method. TA is defined as a "method for identifying, analysing, organising, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, cited in Nowell, *et al.,* 2017). Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a useful six-stage phase of how to conduct TA analysis research using this procedure that can provide "a rigorous thematic analysis can produce trustworthy and insightful findings" (Nowell, *et al.,* (2017, p.2). However, they remark that currently there is no agreement or validated literature to make a definitive statement on how TA should be conducted to achieve trustworthiness. Analysing my data, with the aim to achieve validation and trustworthiness, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process, as well as engaged with reflexivity, and piloted my research questions to ensure that they answered the research questions. I have been rigorous in applying the criteria above, to ensure that my research analysis is an accurate representation of the participants' views. I took an inductive approach to coding, drawing on key ideas from literature review. This provided the basis for coding, generating semantic and latent codes, which I later grouped into themes which provided the starting point for development of findings. Throughout, I have had the benefit of my doctoral supervisors, and, additionally, a colleague reading my drafts and commenting on the content that has enabled me to reflect on my analysis of the data and interpretation as well as linking to theory and the theoretical framework.

4.4 Reflection and Reflexivity

4.4.1 Reflection

The debate around whether reflection and reflexivity are the same concepts is not new (Parton and O'Byrne, 2000; Taylor and White, 2006), with Pease and Fook (1999) using them interchangeably as concepts. In social work and research both reflection and reflexivity are approaches used by the practitioner and researcher to delve into deeper meaning when analysing data or an interview.

Reflection on issues in social work to learn, develop and improve practice is, according to Ferguson (2018), "a universal stated goal" (p.415). Jasper (2003) describes reflection in terms of the process having a constant, circular process of

experience, that in turn, ‘sparks thinking”, thereby influencing future action, and the circular process. Reflection is a core concept in social work but also practised in variety of disciplines for example, teaching, medicine, nursing, and allied professions. Social Work England (2019), as the regulatory body for social work, require social work practitioners to evidence this as a core skill in their CPD when applying annually for reregistration (SWE, 2019, Standard 4.2) and critical reflection is interwoven into the Professional Standards Framework (PCF) (2018, Domain 6). Whilst the use of the latter is not mandatory, the PCF is widely used by social work practitioners to develop and build on practice, as well as gauge capability. However, despite reflection being integrated into practice and used as a developmental tool in supervision there is criticism by several authors (e.g. White, Fook and Gardner, 2006; Ixer, 1999, 2010) that there has been little research about its value to practitioners. More recently Ferguson (2018), based on observations during his research, considered it would be beneficial for other aspects of reflection to be explored. For instance, why practitioners do or do not reflect on issues could be for self-protection, containment, or due to impact on self of reflecting or not, with Ferguson questioning what support practitioners are offered.

Social work is a complex area in a landscape that involves “emotional work of a high order” (Howe, 2008, p.1). This necessitates social workers drawing on themselves as a resource (Trevithick, 2018) and through developing critical reflection as a skill it can help them gain greater understanding and insight into the issues presented. Reflection in supervision, or discussion with peers, or following feedback from service users, provides opportunities to learn from experience, understand power dynamics (Brookfield, 1995). It can be emancipatory, as well as engender change (Fook, 2006). Importantly, it can enable self-awareness of how actions and/or assumptions have influenced practice and decision-making. Biggs (1999) refers to reflection as a replica, “a mirror” (p.6), contending reflection in professional practice provides an opportunity to gain insight what it might be, and how the original can be improved, which is an objective of reflective practice.

Over the years in practice as a probation officer, social work practitioner, therapist, counsellor, and social work educator, I have had the opportunity to develop my knowledge of reflective models. Reflective practice as a model was initially developed

by Dewey (2010; 1933), with models later being developed by Schön (1983) and Kolb (1984). Schön (1983) has been highly influential in social work practice. The model seeks to encourage practitioners to engage by 'reflection *in* action' whilst engaging in a practice task, and after the event by 'reflection *on* action' that enables the practitioner to reflect on the actions they took and their assumptions on an event (Ide and Beddoe, 2024). A similar model is Gibbs (1988) reflective cycle involves the practitioner to work through a number of stages, giving a description of the situation, analysing their feelings, positive and negative evaluation of the experience, analysis and conclusion in terms of what you have learnt and what you would do differently along with an action plan. One of the aims for social work practitioners when undertaking reflective practice is to achieve what Freire (1972) refers to as "critical consciousness" (p.47) that is seen as being central to social work practice. Having this knowledge and experience of integrating these models and processes into my practice provided me with a good starting point to move on to self-reflexivity in the research process.

4.4.2 Reflexivity

Whilst there are some similarities between reflection and reflexivity there are important differences. Whereas reflection offers the opportunity to analyse past events usually and learn something from this experience (Bolton, 2005). Fook (1999) describes reflexivity as "an ability to locate yourself in the picture what you see is influenced by your own way of seeing and how your very presence influences the situation you are researching" (p.12). Reflexivity is defined by Longhofer and Floersch (2012) as "our human capacity to consider ourselves in relation to context, and our contexts in relation to ourselves" (p.513). They argue it is a key component of a critical realist analysis of social work research. Finlay (1998) expands on the value of reflexivity arguing that when you undertake either qualitative or quantitative research to ensure it is "valid, rigorous and relevant" (p.453) you need to engage with reflexivity. To achieve this Finlay (1998) advances researchers adopting "a self-consciously critical, systematic, and analytical approach towards capturing more subjective and inter-subjective dimensions (p.453). According to Finlay (1998) taking this approach can offer a "richer understanding" (p.453), which is one of the goals of the researcher. An important contributor to the debate in the social work arena is that

of Payne (2014), who defines reflexivity in terms of being ‘a cyclical process in which we study how the things that we observe affect our thinking, and how that then affects what we do’, a salient message in social work practice.
Mortari (2015) highlights the importance of not just reflecting on an experience or phenomenon, but you need more depth to understand your perspectives and assumptions, and that can be attained through developing reflexivity (Ide and Beddoe, 2024). However, Ide and Beddoe (2024) point out that although there are several studies putting forth definitions of reflexivity there is lack of clarity of “what reflexivity is, and how to *be* reflexive or *do* reflexivity in research” (p.726) which presents a dilemma also highlighted by Probst (2015).

Braun and Clarke (2013) highlight that personal reflexivity is an essential skill that researchers need to develop, and one that can be acquired through education and training (Mortari 2015). Similarly, Finlay (2002) emphasises that researchers need to factor in critical reflection on their role from the outset of the research process, openly accepting and recognising they are part of the process where their involvement has influence. The development of thematic reflexive analysis was an essential skill for me to develop to analyse my data (Braun and Clarke, 2022). This involved interrogating and acknowledging my own starting points for the processes that delivered the data collection and my focus for analysis of data. I was also able to draw on my reflection on positionality, already discussed in 4.3.
There are several strands in the process to achieving reflexivity. These include self-awareness and self-location that includes being in touch with your actions, emotions, thoughts, gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality (Pillow, 2010, p.732 cited in Ide and Beddoe, 2024). Importantly too are your beliefs, values, judgements, and practice (Finlay, 1998) and how they influence you throughout all stages of the research process. Bolton (2005) stresses the importance of paying close attention to evaluating these areas of reflexivity and “finding strategies to question our own attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions to understand our complex roles in relation to others” (p.13). Braun and Clarke (2022) point out that “when carrying out thematic analysis, reflexivity is never final and complete but an ongoing process of reflection” (p.15) and remind us “it is a journey not a destination” (p.15).

As previously stated above, having knowledge and experience of models of reflection and integrating these into my professional practice provided me with a good starting point to move on to self-reflexivity in the research process. I found it beneficial to have formal and informal discussions with peer researchers, as well as others interested in my research. This gave me an opportunity for engaging in self-reflexivity, similarly to what Kohl and McCutcheon (2015) have termed “everyday talk” as “kitchen table reflexivity” (p.748). These experiences, as well as in-depth discussions with my doctoral supervisors, the content supported by minutes of the meetings, have been invaluable, and have provided me with a safe, empowering, space, to clarify my thoughts, perspectives, assumptions, reflect on potential areas of bias and issues of power and strive to achieve reflexivity to capture the voices of participants.

4.5 Strengths and Limitations of the Methodology

A strength of the research study was that the twenty-one social worker participants who were part of the study, were diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, and experience across a range of social work roles. They were interested in the research topic, as it had relevance to them, being candid, open, and reflective in interviews about their ‘lived experiences.’ Furthermore, they shared how they managed their continuing professional development obligation alongside organising their complex, demanding workloads, as well as their personal lives and commitments. When considering the potential number of participants to interview I read around Braun & Clarke’s (2013) advise on sample sizes to decide when you consider you have reached saturation. Reflecting on this and considering my position and personal resources I felt that the sample number met their guidance and was a realistic number.

Selecting a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2013; 2022; Byrne, 2021) for analysis provided me with a wealth of rich in-depth data. This enabled me to interpret an array of codes, which were translated to themes, which focused across a range of social work practice challenges and organisational issues. Through the interaction in interviews, I felt privileged that participants were willing to share their deep thoughts and reflections with me, which I endeavoured to analyse and interpret to bring alive their voices so that they can be heard and empowered. My aim for the

research study has been to contribute to the debate around continuing professional development and shape future learning and opportunities for social workers.

In terms of limitations the field work for the research study took place during COVID 19 pandemic, therefore interviews were undertaken virtually. Although this was not originally as I had planned, once the anxiety about the technical equipment issues had dissipated these were, with recent feedback I realised when I began to analyse the material that I had perhaps been too ambitious in having too many questions, and although it was a small-scale research study there were a lot of participants to interview for one researcher, especially within a finite time frame. Despite these concerns and pressures, I managed to personally transcribe all the scripts that generated an enormous amount of data. I, furthermore, manually analysed these, which was time consuming as noted by many authors. However, on the other hand, Dunwoodie, Macaulay, and Newman (2022) comment that if the researcher selects this option, it has a positive spin-off as it gives them “a head start on data analysis”. They point out that by the time they commence the formal analysis process they have “become deeply ingrained in the data” (p.880), with which I agree, as I confidently knew the themes and contexts. Although I had some knowledge and elementary training on NVivo (2023) with hindsight it would have been helpful to have become competent in this approach that would have been an aid to generate codes and themes, as well as authenticate my work.

4.6 Research Data Collection Methods

Once I had decided on my research area, I considered the research instruments for collecting the data.

4.6.1 Selection of method

I initially considered whether to use an online survey, for example Survey Monkey, but decided not to go down that route as I did not consider it would give me the depth of data that I required for qualitative data. Another option I considered was running Focus Groups, a social science method devised by Robert Merton and colleagues in the 1940s (Merton and Kendall,1946; Roller and Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 109-110 cited in Bell and Waters, 2018). This is a popular approach used by social science researchers particularly in the fields of marketing and to attain political views.

Although I have experience of running therapeutic groups, as well as managing and chairing diverse groups and contemporaneously recording these, I do not have experience of running Focus groups, recording these, and using various technology. I was conscious that this method had many variables to consider in terms of location, timeframe, gender, personalities etc., and that I would need a colleague to assist with the management and technology. I was concerned about the time factor this would involve and impose on a colleague, recognising they normally have a busy schedule. In addition, I would need to build in time for personal development around filming and recording groups to become effective and competent.

In consultation with my two supervisors and looking at the advantages and disadvantages of both these approaches, and the areas I wanted to explore to answer my research questions, I discounted these Survey and Focus Group approaches, for the above reasons, in preference to undertaking individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews. According to sociologists Gubrium and Holstein (2002) we live in an “interview society” (cited in Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.77), indicating that this is a familiar way to collect research data, and being the dominant approach in qualitative research. Having a social work background a prime social work task has been undertaking interviews for various tasks, be it assessment, interventions, or counselling, so felt comfortable selecting a research method that drew on my knowledge and skills especially managing diverse situations. Researchers, such as Kvale (2007) define interviewing in terms of a “professional conversation” (cited in Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.77) that gives the participant and opportunity to “talk about their experiences and perspectives, and to capture their language and concepts” (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, cited in Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.77) with regard to the specific topic you have selected to discuss in the interview interaction. A similar view is held by Burgess (1984), who refers to semi-structured interviews as “a conversation with a purpose”. Whereas the face-to-face interview is seen by Novick (2008, cited in Braun & Clarke, 2013) as the “gold standard” (p.79). Although some authors view virtual interviews as “poor substitute,” they concede that with the right circumstances it can be an “effective data generation tools” (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004, cited in Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.79).

The merits and strengths of using semi-structured interviews include the interviewer using their own personal style and experience; the semi-structured schedule, using open-ended questions that can be prepared beforehand. The approach enables the interviewer to be flexible with their responses, it enables clarification of points, following up on issues, and providing prompts, if necessary. Data collection by semi-structured interviews is relatively an unstructured and flexible approach (Moser & Korstjens, 2018) and given the right circumstances this process enables the participant to provide in-depth, comprehensive responses on areas that are important to them, thus providing diverse, rich, detailed data. On the other hand, there can be limitations, for example, as the task can become time consuming for both the interview, participant, and transcriber. Additionally, if the interviewer lacks experience of interviewing or working with people with sensitive issues or problems, this can impact on the interaction and affect the participant's ability to engage in the process. In view of my social work background, and previous research experience, I considered that the approach selected would the best option for my research objectives.

Having considered all the above issues, I initially set about preparing the semi-structured interview schedule by noting down the different areas I wanted to explore, drawing on my own experience, as well as areas highlighted in the literature on CPD. I then made a mind-map of areas such as: social worker's journey into social work; social work education; understanding of CPD; how they were able to meet the social work regulators requirements; CPD opportunities and any gaps; challenges and changes in practice; what impact does CPD have on practice; is there a connection between CPD and professional identity? The interview schedule was influenced by the literature review reading, my experience in the field and to answer the research questions. Questions were constructed and worded so that they were open-ended to what Smith (1995, cited in Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.84) recommends are "gentler and less loaded but sufficient to let the respondent know what the area of interest is and recognising he or she has something to say about it" (Smith, 1995, p.15). Completing the interviewed schedule I referred to Braun and Clarke (2013) who provide a useful series of questions (p.85) to ask yourself to scrutinise the document and whether the questions posed help answer the research question. They point out however that the qualitative interview does not have to be a fixed process when you

commence the data collection process and that it is likely to evolve as you proceed (Charmaz, 2002). You can then add or remove questions from the guide if this is deemed appropriate, as I did after the pilot interviews (see paragraph below). Once satisfied that the phraseology and questions were relevant, I discussed this with my supervisors and following approval evaluated it by using it with a colleague. I then completed the interview schedule by working out a list of prompts and probes for each question so that I had these available to engage with participants should I wish them to provide more detail or expand on their answers, as well as be an aid to me as research interviewer. Following the two pilot interviews (outlined in 4.7.3 below), I amended the document to include a question on austerity and Covid 19 pandemic (Q.6). The final document can be found at Appendix 11.p.336.

4.6.2 Sampling and Selection of Participants

My aim for the research study was to interview between twenty and twenty-five social worker participants, diverse in terms of gender, age range, diversity, culture, social work qualifications, post-qualifications, field of practice, role, and type of organisation in which they practised, as well as being at various stages in their careers. I wanted to replicate, as far as possible, the social work population workforce in England, especially in terms of gender, ethnicity, and career experience, as I felt the diversity would add richness to the data. I adopted a purposive sampling approach to selecting participants who could be “potentially most informative” (Moser & Korstjens, 2018), as I wanted participants to be potentially most informative, as well as have characteristics to engender “insight and in-depth understanding” (Patton, 2002, p.230) concerning the study topic area. There are several choices of purposive sampling approaches e.g., Convenience (Patton, 2002), and Theoretical (Marshall, 1996 cited in Braun & Clarke, 2013; Coyne, 1997), but having considered these I felt the most appropriate to reach potential participants would be supplementing this by snowballing approach (Coleman, 1958; Goodman, 2011) but was keen to ensure the sample was diverse and representative.

Additionally, my research enquiry was on CPD I resolved to only interview participants who were not in their very early stages of their careers or newly qualified and post

ASYE. The rationale for this was that the ASYE post qualification programme was very structured and prescriptive in many areas and by inviting more experienced workers to participate would offer a wider range of perspectives on ongoing educational and training CPD opportunities.

4.6.3 Research Ethical Considerations

Ethics and Values are central and core foundations of social worker practice (Biestek, 1961; Banks, 1995, 2001, 2012; Parrot, 2006; 2014; BASW, 2014, 2021; International Definition of Social Work, 2014; Beckett, Maynard and Jordon, 2017), alongside the requirement to work in an anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive manner, whether with individuals, who are service users, colleagues, partnership working or anyone with whom you come in contact professionally, or personally. In addition, social work practice is built on respect for human beings, social justice, and professional integrity (BASW,2014; SWE, 2019). These central beliefs were core to my own personal socialisation and influenced me to select probation and social work as a professional choice of career and are embedded into my own practice. Social Work Professional Codes of Practice (SWE, 2019) require social workers, with whom they work, to support to their well-being, as well as protection and uphold human rights, dignity, respect, and an important guiding principle is to ensure they provide “safe and effective practice” (SWE, 2020, p.1) and, importantly “public trust and confidence in social services” (SWE, 2023a, p.45). Honesty, integrity and doing no harm are core principles and integral to ethical practice (BASW,2014; SWE, 2019), as well as ethical research guidance (Brunel University London Code of Ethics, 2013; British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018 & 2024). The principle for researchers to demonstrate non-maleficence, is a core requirement for researchers and they have a duty to ensure that they protect their participants from harm, as well as ensure their data is safeguarded. With regard to the latter point, USBs used for data, plus copies of these, are all kept in a locked safe when not in use.

In addition, Braun & Clarke (2022, p.29), drawing on British Psychological Society’s Ethics’ Code guidance (BPS, 2009), advise “ethical thinking is not optional”. They emphasise the importance of ethical considerations being an integral part throughout the different research stages. Their observation is comparable to other guidance, that

emphasises that the field of research is surrounded by complexities, uncertainties, that is located within a political arena and the importance that research conduct is underpinned by cultural sensitivity, with a genuine desire to achieve inclusiveness (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Prior to commencing my research documentation, I gave a lot of thought to what name I would refer to the social workers in my research study. I read through some contemporary theses, and I tussled with different names, ‘respondents, participants, subjects, or individuals’ recalling that in my MPhil., I had called social work students interviewed, respondents. I read an interesting paper by Vanclay, Baines, and Taylor (2013) about the principles in research and the importance of language, terminology and interactions and the importance of not discrediting or judging individuals and giving persons respect, and “their views are faithfully recorded and given due consideration in the assessment process” (p.246) that led me to believe that ‘participant’ was the most appropriate word.

4.6.4 Ethics Approval

Whilst I was undertaking my prequalifying social work education and training one of the modules was on Moral Philosophy. This was an excellent introduction to philosophical and historical aspects of ethics and questions of morality, beliefs, and standards (Jennings, 2003). It provided the guiding principles around personal and professional behaviour to take on the challenges so often prevalent when working with individuals who faced many issues. To familiarise myself with contemporary issues and data protection requirements I undertook Brunel University Graduate School training in research Ethics and Research Data Management. This was in the form of attendance at a course of lectures, workshops, and online courses on different aspects of research ethics. I familiarised myself with Brunel University London Code of Ethics (2013) and Brunel University London Research Integrity Code of Practice (2019), as well as BERA (2018; 2024) to inform my practice. Reviewing the various documents and having the benefit of the face-to-face workshops enabled different aspects of the research experience to be explored in more depth, as well as focus on the different challenges that can be encountered and be aware of possible solutions to address these.

I submitted the following documentation for approval from Brunel University London Ethics Committee; Application plus other research documentation (e.g., Participation Information Sheet and Confidentiality Statement for Participants (Appendix 6, p.327); Consent Form (Appendix 7, p.331); Participation Profile Information (Appendix 8, p.332); Flyer and Information for Prospective Participants (Appendix 9, p.334); Guidance for transcription Confidentiality Statement (Appendix 10, p.335). Following appraisal by committee I was given full approval on 7th January 2021 (Appendix 5, p. 325). Additionally, there is the Interview Schedule Guidance (Appendix 11, p.336).

4.6.5 Informed Consent

Once the prospective participants had received the Flyer and Information for Prospective Participants (Appendix 9, p.334) to be part of the research and indicated that they were willing to participate in the research each was provided with a bundle of information consisting of: Participation Sheet, including Confidentiality Statement, (Appendix 6, p.327); Participation Profile Information Form (Appendix 8, 332); Consent Form (Appendix 7, p.331) and Interview Schedule Guidance (Appendix 11, p.336). The Participation Information Sheet set out the purpose of the research study, who should take part in the research, recruitment of participants, as well as who should be contacted following the semi-structured interviews in case of complaint, as well as were invited to make further contact with the researcher if desired. Importantly, the form emphasised the voluntarism of participating and the right to withdraw at any stage until end of June 2021 when analysis of data would commence. These points were reinforced at the commencement of the interview process. Additionally, the form set out in detail issues of confidentiality and how the data would be stored, anonymised, and managed throughout the research period. The prospective participants were asked to read through the various forms and sign a consent form and return to me, as researcher (Vanclay, Baines, & Taylor, 2013).

4.6.6 Confidentiality, Anonymity, and Data Management

A key aspect of research is confidentiality in terms of participants, as well as their data, and integrity of the research process. All information, whether private or

personal should be treated with respect and confidentially and not disclosed to others. Vanclay, Baines & Taylor (2013) point out that when information is reported to a researcher, it is their prerogative to decide what they report, it is essential when a disclosure is made that is confidential it is protected (p.247). However, as a social worker I am bound to report any safeguarding risks.

The Participation Information Sheet also sets out in detail issues of confidentiality, how the data would be stored safely, anonymised, and managed throughout the research period. Additionally, the data be kept in accordance with Brunel University London timeline for safe disposal.

4.7 Participant Recruitment

In my professional life I had worked across various counties, boroughs, and Universities for over forty years in various roles, such as probation officer, University tutor/lecturer, practice educator/assessor, Guardian ad Litem, Independent Social Worker. This gave me a wealth of information and contacts across rural and urban organisations a wide range of different locations on which I could draw on to invite individuals to participate in my research. As I was still in professional contact with various organisational coordinators, managers and individual social workers that gave me an opportunity to mention I would be looking for research participants. This engendered interest in my research which was warmly received with social workers, offering to participate in the study and pass on any research information to colleagues.

In the interim I devised a Word Cloud Flyer and recruitment letter and following approval I then circulated by email this to a number of social workers practitioners in different counties/boroughs who had indicated their interest in participating in the research study inviting them to participate in my research. This Word Cloud Flyer set out details and requirements and invited individuals to contact me if they wished to participate, whilst stressing the voluntarism of participation (Appendix 9. p.334).

It was encouraging that within a short space of time I had a good number of return emails indicating interest from social work practitioners. On receiving these I then sent out invitations to potential participate, that included the various forms outlined above, and, importantly, the Participation Sheet, which included the confidentiality statement (Appendix 6, p.327) and Consent Form (Appendix 7, p.331) to those

interested in participating. All the potential participants who agreed to be interviewed completed the various forms, signing the consent form and returned them to me by email. A number of prospective participants then indicated they were happy to pass on the Word Cloud flyer to colleagues and team members. The uptake of the invitation from a range of from social workers thus enabling me to meet the participant numbers. The bulk of the interviews took place between January 2021 and August 2021, with a few, who were unable to meet proposed dates, rescheduled to early 2022 and following this I closed recruitment for any further potential participants.

4.7.1 Method of Data Collection

As previously indicated my initial plan was to conduct face-to-face interviews with participants but I had to change my plans when the challenges of Covid 19 pandemic, and social distancing required me to move to remote data collection.

4.7.2 Choice of Technology

Videorecording such as Zoom already has a history of being used for data collection in research (Archibald *et al*., 2019).

Zoom is a videoconferencing platform that has already been extensively used for research purposes (Lobe, Morgan & Hoffman, 2020), so it is not a new initiative in social work practice or research. To accommodate this shift in process I had discussions with the potential participants on the practical arrangements and to agree with them which audio /video conferencing platforms were available, and their preference. Exploring options there were a number to choose from available that were mostly free for small numbers. For example, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, WhatsApp, FaceTime, Google Workspace, or mobile recording. However, some organisations had strict rules about which system the participants could use with their organisational tablets, laptops, or desktops. Whilst Some participants were at the initial stages of getting to grips with using technology for interviewing clients/service users, whilst others were more confident and had begun to use Zoom, Microsoft Teams and WhatsApp for meetings and interventions with clients/service users or colleagues. The advantages of using Zoom for example is the preplanning, such as downloading the Zoom mobile app or onto desktop that makes accessing the research connection through the ‘one-click’ easy through the hyperlink. Other

features include privacy features and at the end of the session receiving a “high-quality draft, which can be further refined” (Lobe, Morgan, and Hoffman, 2020) plus an audio-video recording and simultaneous transcriptions. The transcript can be downloaded and saved onto another system (e.g. onto memory stick or desktop) or remain on the Zoom platform for a limited period of time which are Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) compliant (cited in Lobe, Morgan & Hoffman, 2020). It is important that transferred information is confidentially secured, original names removed and anonymised. Confidential information on USBs is kept in a safe when not in use.

To collect the research data the majority of the participant interviews were conducted via Zoom with a minority by Microsoft Teams and two via Google that have similar features built in to Zoom. However, some participants encountered problems with their internet connectivity, a minority had issues with their organisational laptop and had to ‘borrow’ their partners for the session, again a minority encountered interruptions from either their mobiles or their children. The interviews were held at times convenient to the participants, lasted between fifty minutes and one hour thirty minutes.

4.7.3 Pilot Study

Following approval from Brunel Ethics Committee (Appendix 5) to commence my research data collection I decided to undertake an initial pilot study. Undertaking a pilot or feasibility study is considered good practice in research to test out with a small number of individuals to test the instruments, tools, and techniques to evaluate whether these will function effectively together. It also provides an opportunity when working with individuals where there may be sensitive areas under discussion to ensure that the research process is respectful, sensitive and is underpinned by ethics and values.

Polit and Beck (2017) state that by ensuring that a pilot study is well-planned, it can help identify confounding various that were not known previously…”. And comment that devising a pilot study “is also helpful in refining strategies” (Polit & Beck, 2017, cited in Lowe, 2019).

To conduct my pilot interviews, I used the semi-structured interview schedule I had prepared above (see paragraph 6.17). Familiarising myself with the information I set up the pilot interviews by asking two people in the field of social work if they would be part of the first pilot study, to which they agreed. Good practice indicates the importance for the researcher and research participant establishing good rapport to have the best chance of attaining maximum, meaningful responses and expressing them freely. My background of working in relationship-based practice, enabled me to feel confident when starting off the interviews. The process enabled me to work through the various questions, using the prompt sheet when I felt their answers needed expanding. After the session I rephased one of the questions to make the question more focused. The pilot session was also useful to evaluate the phraseology of the questions, and review how they were sequenced and grouped. Although originally planned face-to-face interviews as they were to be conducted during Covid 19 lockdown, I primarily used Zoom or Microsoft Teams video conferencing tools. Because of this I specifically wanted to check out whether the technology worked effectively at a distance and whether I felt at ease and familiar with the recording process and could effectively deal with any issues if they arose. In one of the pilot interviews an incident arose, as although the individual participant had booked in time for the interview, they were consistently interrupted by their work (computer pinging and phone ringing). This gave me insight into the pressures that individuals were experiencing during Covid with trying to achieve a home/work life balance. This raised the importance of selecting a timeframe when participants were least likely to be interrupted and prompted me to add this to my pre-email interview letter to specifically to ask potential participants about their specific availability to minimise interruptions.

4.7.4 Sample Size

According to Patton (2002, p.244, cited in Braun & Clarke,2013, p.55) in qualitative research samples tends to be smaller, conveying “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry”. Other authors, such as Gough & Connor 2006 and Terry & Braun (2011a cited in Braun & Clarke, 2013) suggest that between fifteen and thirty individual interviews is the norm, with Braun & Clarke (2013) suggesting this within the bounds. They proffer that a crucial point for deciding when the sample size is

sufficient is usually when the researcher considers they have reached saturation, although in terms of thematic analysis this can be problematic (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Cobin and Strass, 2014). Authors indicate that this will become apparent when you have generated a lot of data that enables you to meet the criteria you set out, as well as have enough data “to tell a rich story but not too much that it precludes deep, complex engagement with the data in the time available” (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005, cited in Braun & Clarke, 2013), and crucially whether the data generated and analysed “will have credibility” (Patton,2002, p.244, cited in Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.55). I regularly reviewed the individual transcriptions, for themes and sub-themes they were generating and how they were answering my research question. Evaluating these in consultation with my supervisors a wealth of rich data from twenty-one participant interviews was emerging which I felt justified the choice of research design.

4.7.5 Transcription of Data

Although Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Googe platforms gave the option of generating automatic transcriptions I also audio record the interviews separately as a backup that were subsequently deleted following transcription. The audio transcriptions were verbatim. Once the transcripts were downloaded it was important, for confidentiality purposes, to change the participant’s name on the transcript, which I did, giving them pseudonyms, which were also used when referring to participants’ data in the research findings. I had previous experience of transcribing research data for my MPhil and decided to transcribe the interviews myself. Prior to commencing the transcribing, I ensured that I had the Media Player software on my desktop to transcribe the audio data recordings (MP4) and familiarised myself with the operating system, reading a script, listening intently, stopping, and starting to ensure accuracy and competence. Some research authors writing on the process mention that generally modern-day scripts are of a “high quality” although when transcribing the audio recordings, I found that the quality and accuracy of the text were variable, and contingent on dialect, pronunciation, and linguistic variation. Another point was the spelling tended to be Americanised so careful attention needed to be paid to the text spelling and phrases that needed to be amended to be representative of what the participant was saying. Braun & Clarke (2013) when writing about transcriptions

remark that the aim is to produce “thorough and high-quality scripts” (p.162) but recognise there are unavoidable limitations but can still produce one that is “good enough” (p.162). I decided to transcribe the transcripts verbatim, putting in for instance fillers like, “um, ooh, uh, mm-hmm, yeah, you know, laughter, repeat words.” Overall, the task of transcribing twenty-one transcriptions was very lengthy, and, at times, quite tiring and overwhelming. I felt that by reviewing and listening to the audio I managed to get the transcripts to a good enough standard. However, on the positive side transcribing the data myself helped me to become familiar with individual participants’ data, especially the nuances, the emotional content, and expressions of participants’ feelings about CPD. In addition, through the listening task, the overall content in the text was a good barometer of how the interviews were connecting to the research questions.

4.8 Profiles of Participants in the Research Study

This section focuses on the personal profiles of the social work practitioners who participated in the research project. The information provides data covering areas such as gender, ethnicity, age range, any disability, social work qualification at point of entry to profession, post-qualifying awards, practice experience, field of social work practice and whether they worked in a statutory, voluntary, or private organisation.

The individual personal profiles of participant social workers were anonymised and given pseudonyms. These pseudonyms are used when using the fragments of data to illustrate the participants’ perspectives. The basic data table of the social worker participants is in the appendices – (Appendix 12 p.341).

4.8.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

This section will focus on the personal data analysis of the group of twenty-one post-qualified social work practitioners who participated in the research study. The information provided a variety of data covering areas such as gender, ethnicity, age range, disability, previous work experience, qualifications, social work qualification, years in social work practice, type of organisation and social work area of practice

and other responsibilities. In view of the uneven number of participants in the study, percentage figures used are rounded up or down in accordance with statistical data protocol (AMA Manual of Style, 11th Edition 2020).

The demographic characteristics of participants are set out in Appendix 12, p.341.

4.8.2 Gender of Participants

Figure 1 indicates that out of the twenty-one participants who were interviewed, fourteen were female (67%) and seven (33%) were male. Although it had been an aspiration to broadly mirror the national gender profile of registered social workers in England the final cohort of participants in the study indicate slightly less females and a higher percentage of males participating. The SWE figures of registered social workers in England at the end of November 2024 indicated 83% female social workers and 17% of males (SWE, 2025).

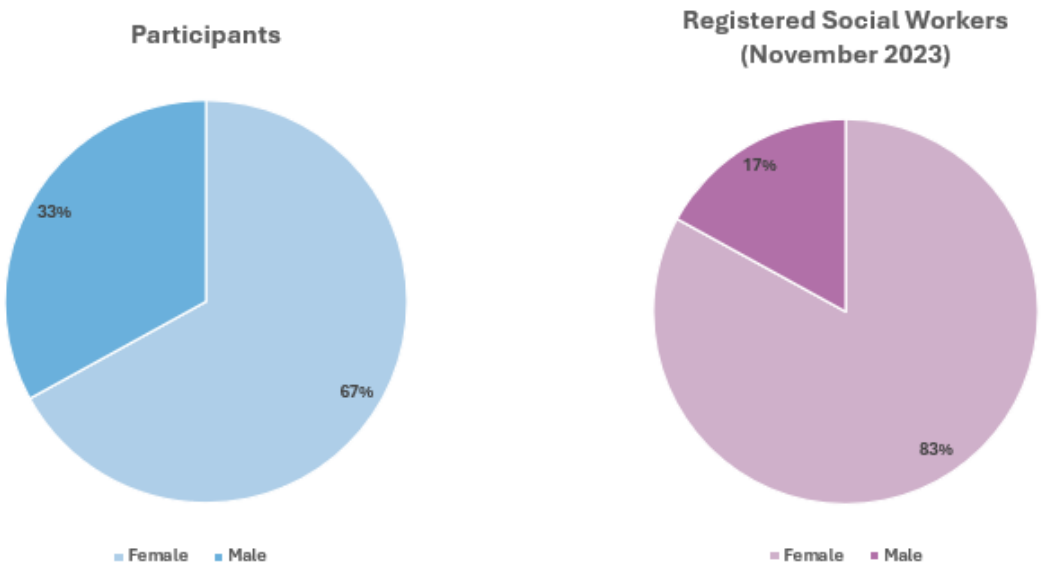


Figure 1: Gender of Participants and Gender of Registered Social Workers

4.8.3 Ethnicity of Participants

In terms of ethnicity of participants, Figure 2 below indicates that out of twenty-one participants in the study, seventeen (81%) were white, that included fourteen (66%)

white English, with three other participants identifying one (5%) white European, one (5%) white Irish, one (5%) white Welsh. Four others (19%) identified themselves as being from a black or ethnic minority group (BAME); two (9%) Black African; one (5%) from British Asian of Pakistani heritage and one (5%) mixed race of English and Indian heritage. Comparing the sample with the registered social workers in England (SWE, 2023) the data revealed a higher rate of white participants compared with registered social workers in England (SWE, 2023), and lower rate of ethnic minorities registered, which was twenty-four (24%).

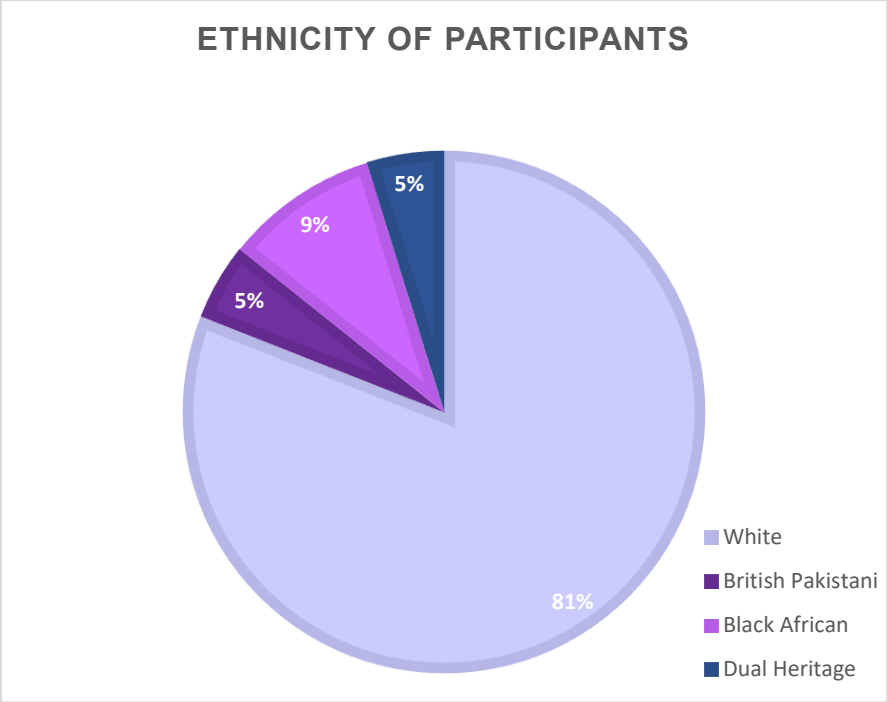


Figure 2: Ethnicity of Participants

4.8.4 Age Distribution of Participants

Figure 3 below gives a breakdown of the age distribution of participants. Of the fourteen (67%) female, and seven (33%) male there were no participants under the age of thirty, whereas SWE (2023) indicated that 9% of registered social workers came into the under twenty-one age band.

The age band data indicates that six (29%) of females and one (5%) of males were in the age band thirty to forty years, a total of 34%, that was the largest group in the study. This is slightly higher than SWE (2023) age band range that indicates 29% are in this category.

The age range band forty-one to fifty years there were five (24%) of females and three (14%) of males, again these are a total higher percentage than SWE (2023) who recorded 26% in this category.

In age range band, fifty-one to sixty plus years, there were three (14%) females and three (14%) of males, totalling 28% which is less than the combination calculations of SWE (2023) for over fifties which is 40% of the social work workforce.

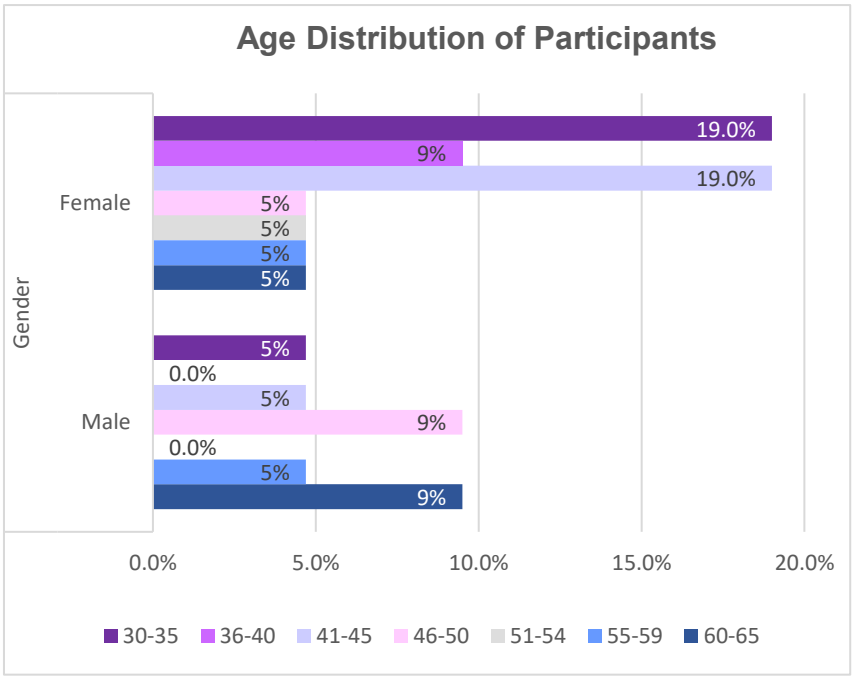


Figure 3: Age Distribution of Participants

4.8.5 Social Work Qualification on Entry to Workforce

Figure 4 illustrates the social work professional programme that participants undertook that entitled them to entry to the social work profession.

BSc or BA in Social work	9	43%
Masters in social work	4	19%
PG - Diploma in Social Work	3	14%
CQSW	2	10%
Step-Up Programme	3	14%

Prior to starting the formal social work education and training programme ten (48%) had taken a previous degree, plus one (5%) a foundation degree. These degrees were a mixture some being related to social sciences or social policy, or entirely

different field. Three (14%) participants indicated that they had professional qualifications in unrelated fields.

Data from participants indicated that prior to undertaking formal social work education and training programmes that all had prior experience of working with individuals where there was a social care element or allied profession. For instance, working as Assistant Social Worker, Care Assistant/Worker, Volunteer, Mental Health Assistant, Youth Offending Worker, or for instance working in a charity, such as a Samaritan, or with people who were subject to Domestic Abuse Worker or had substance misuse issues. Seven (33%) worked in voluntary charitable organisation, five (24%) worked in Youth Offending Teams, nine (43%) were involved in full-time employment in direct work in Statutory or Charitable Organisations and seven (33%) were volunteers in a variety of organisations whilst undertaking a first degree or afterwards whilst in employment.

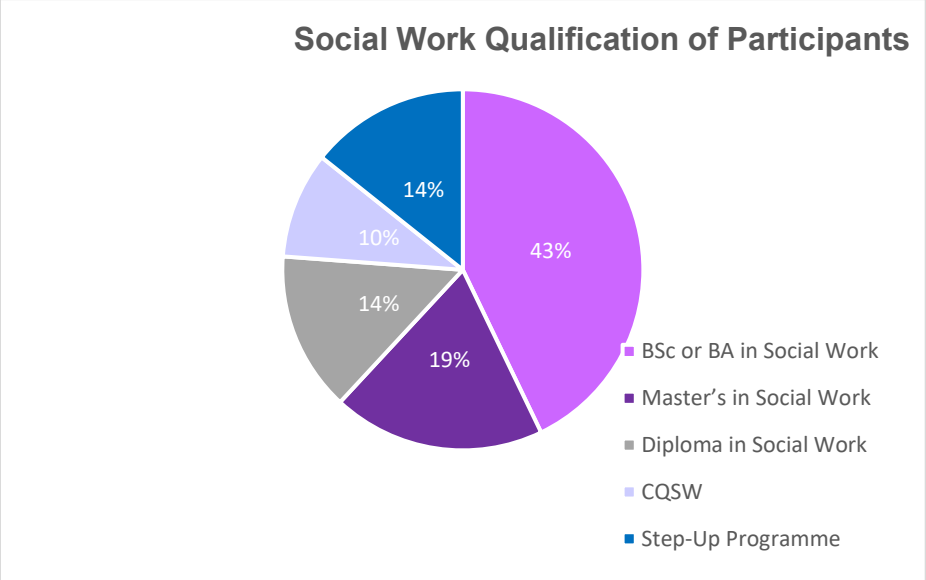


Figure 4: Social Work Qualification of Participants

4.8.6 Participants' Years in Social Work Practice

Out of the twenty-one participants, eight (38) females and three (14%) males had between five- and nine-years' experience in practice. Three (14%) females and one (5%) male had between ten and fifteen years; one (5%) had between sixteen and

twenty years, one (5%) female between twenty-one and twenty-five years; one (5%) male between twenty-six and thirty years and one (5%) female and two (9%) males over thirty years. The majority of participants had worked in a number of different social work settings in different roles since qualification.

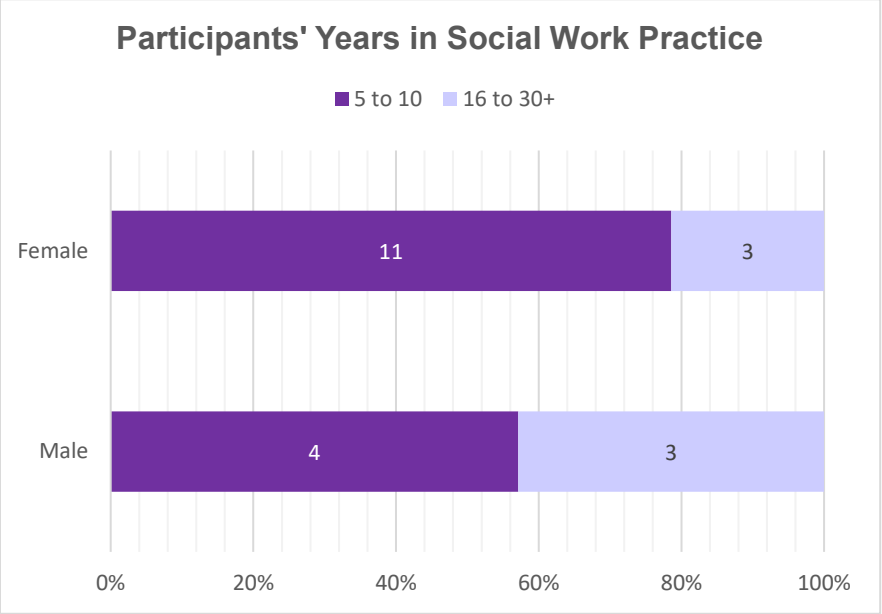


Figure 5: Participants' Years in Social Work Practice

4.8.7 Participants' Social Work Practice Roles

The participants in the CPD research study had, apart from one, all advanced in their careers. The data revealed that one (5%) female was a basic grade social worker. Seven (33%) females and three (14%) males were senior social workers. Two participants were Deputy Team Managers, one (5%) female and one (5%) male. Five participants, three (14%) females and two (9%) males were Team or Pod Managers. One (5%) male was a Service Managers. The two independent participants, one (5%) female and one (5%) male, were primarily working in independent fieldwork as practitioners, as well as teaching/tutoring/mentoring in pre- and post-qualifying social work. An article by Samuel (Community Care, 2017) indicated that Freedom of Information (FOI) response revealed that men were over-represented in senior roles (61% to 39%), whereas social care workforce overall is 82%. The small sample of my data also indicates that men (19%) were over-represented in management roles.

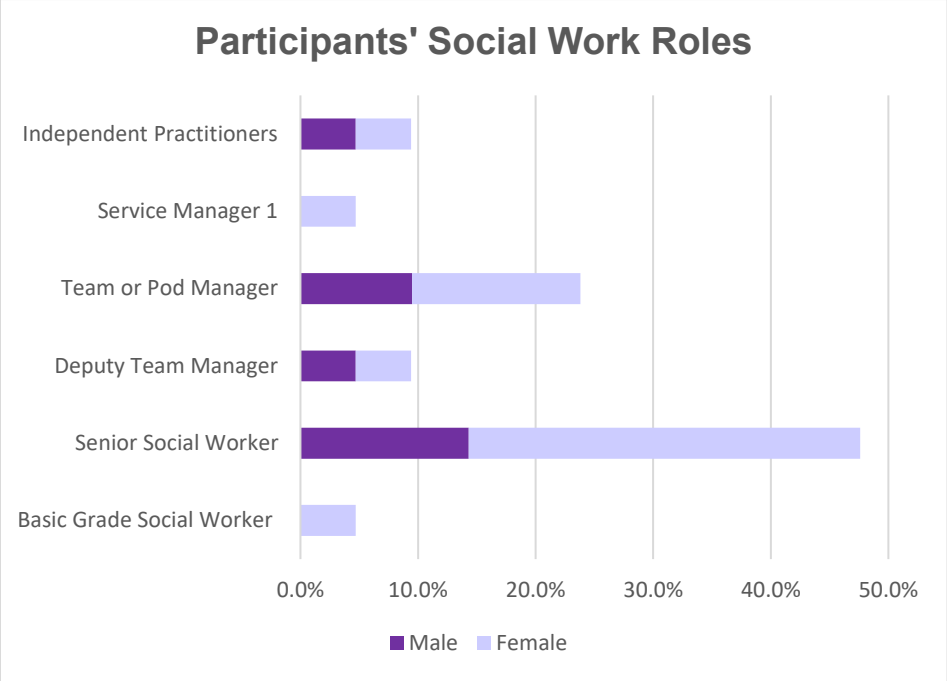


Figure 6: Participants' Social Work Practice Roles

4.8.8 Participants' Service User Group

Out of the twenty-one participants, thirteen (62%) worked with Children and Families, ten (48%) of females and three (14%) males. In adult services, which covered mental health, learning disabilities and elderly, there were eight (38%) participants that was split evenly between four (19%) males and four (19%) females.

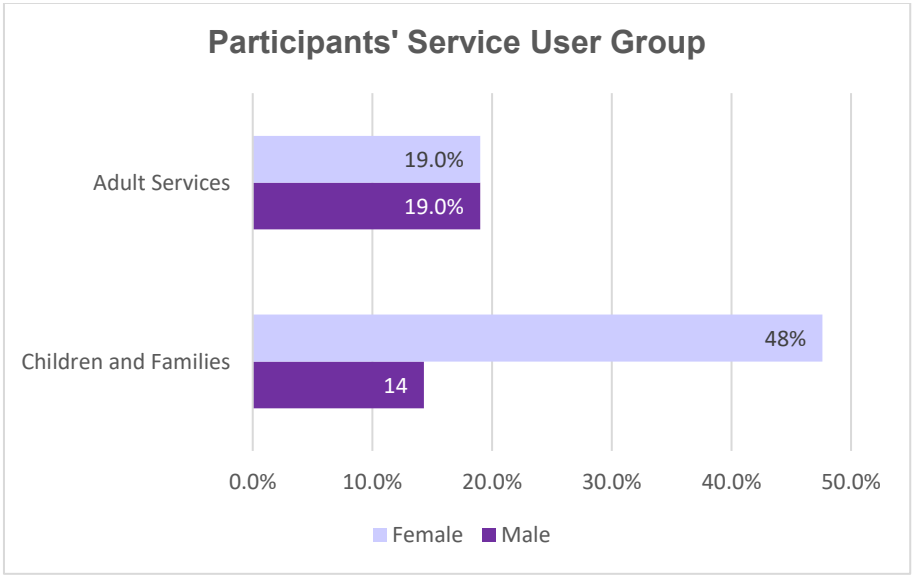


Figure 7: Participants' Service User Group

4.8.9 Participants' Organisation Settings

Of the twenty-one participants, eighteen (86%) worked in statutory settings; twelve (57%) in Children & Family; Six (29%%) in Adult Services or Mental Health. Two (9%) Independent Practitioners Participants working in practice, plus pre and post education, and one (5%) as a Service Manager in a Private Mental Health Hospital setting.

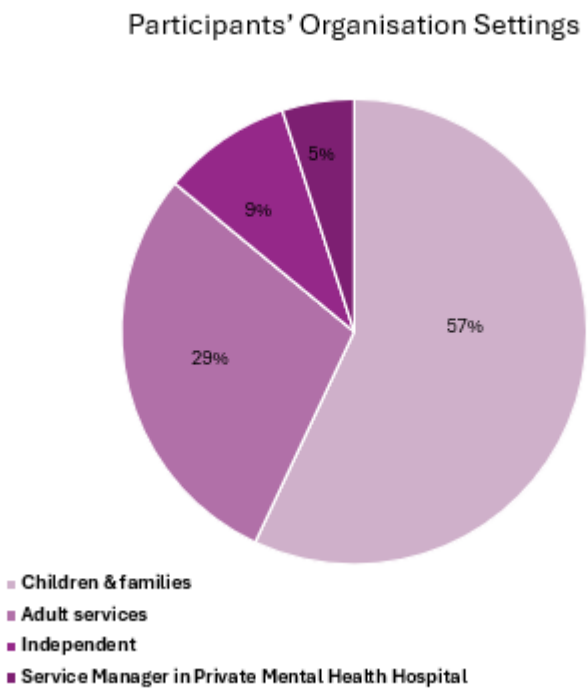


Figure 8: Participants' Organisation Settings

Summary

The data covered in this section gives an overview of the different characteristics of the participants interviewed for the research study. As previous indicated within this section when I was in the process of selecting participants for the research study, I had an aspiration to try and mirror the national profile of England Social Work registrants, in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and practice roles, and who were registered with Social Work England. I did not consciously seek out or did not reject any participant who came forward and met the criteria to become part of the research sample. Reflecting on the sample and their characteristics I consider that these were representative of the social workforce and employing organisations. The empirical

data provided rich data of the participants' perspectives of their lived experience of undertaking CPD whilst working in contemporary social work environments and provided a benchmark to evaluate this against a number of variables.

4.9 Data Analysis

Primary research was conducted with twenty-one social work practitioners at various stages in their careers. The research was situated within an interpretive paradigm, using semi-structured narrative interviews to understand the social workers' experiences. According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996) "there is no single right way to analyse qualitative data, equally it is essential to find ways of using the data to think with" (p.2.) Their view is supported by Miles and Huberman (1994) who point out that there are there are a variety of different practises to the analysis of qualitative approaches that identify different tasks which are similar. In considering how I would analyse my data I selected a Thematic Analysis (TA), approach, which is a pertinent method to use alongside qualitative research methods. Braun, *et al.,* (2019) describe TA as "an umbrella term, designating sometimes quite different approaches aimed at identifying patterns across qualitative data sets" (p.844). It is a method that is used by many different research fields because of its flexibility. The overall goal of TA is to make sense of the issue by analysing and interpreting data, rather than summarising the main questions and using them as the themes (Clarke & Braun,2013).

In order to analyse my primary data, I used Braun and Clarke (2006; 2013; 2022) step-by-step guidance, and read other authors' accounts, such as McGuire and Delahunt (2017) and Bryne (2021), who have explored and built on their approach. This effectively guided me through the process and informed my practise. Similarly, Creswell (2009) also uses a six-step approach to analyse and interpreting thematic analysis data.

This process is underpinned by qualitative research techniques for undertaking research "and to a wider framework for conducting research or paradigm" that is underpinned by "beliefs, assumptions, values and practices" (Braun & Clarke (2013,

p.4). Furthermore, Braun & Clarke (2013) suggest that the researcher uses the approach to by discarding previous judgements, “perspectives or values” relating to their own culture and become “like an explorer”, shifting into a new culture that is not judged by their own perspectives or values (cited in Braun & Clarke, 2013 p.3).

4.9.1 Data Analysis Process

The TA method devised by Braun & Clarke (2006, 2013, 2022) has six-phases that are formulated into a sequential order. However, the authors emphasise that researchers should not plan to work through it in a linear process. They assert that the “analysis is recursive and iterative, requiring the researcher to move back and forth through the phases as necessary” (Braun & Clarke, 2020 cited in Byrne, 2021, p.8). This method allows an in-depth exploration by the researcher. Whilst TA is process that is time consuming, it is a flexible approach to take account of the research questions and generated data, resulting in new interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2022).

The next sections outline how I used Braun & Clarke’s (2006) six-phases guide to the thematic analysis process.

4.9.2 Phase one: Familiarisation with the Data

The process of familiarisation with the data commenced when I was listening intently to the audio recordings, correcting, and amending the scripts where necessary. This process gave me a good overview of the responses of participants to the various areas under discussion. After reading through several scripts, I began to identify patterns and themes, making notes and first impressions. Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight the importance of being familiar with all the data set and resisting the temptation to “skip over” this phase or be selective (2006, p.17). I followed the same process until I had completed transcribing the twenty-one scripts, and whilst time-consuming the process enabled me to be immersed in the data, with patterns and themes emerging.

Whilst engaged in this process I devised several templates with headings to enable the data to become more accessible but organised and ensure I was systematic in my approach. The first template had the participant's pseudonym, number of question and two columns headed participant's name and code. Using this one I copied and pasted the text of each question into the columns and used the final column when coding. Another grid template had pseudonym name, with columns headed: Question title; code; theme; Link to Theoretical Framework; Text reference. This was used for stage two process onwards when I separately cut and pasted each of the participants' questions into the separate sections. This enabled me to fill in the sections at different intervals.

4.9.3 Phase two: Generate Initial Codes.

Starting the coding process following the transcription of the of the scripts I continued to read and re-read these and began to see patterns of words, and connections emerging. This is a "inductive, or "bottom up" approach, rather than a deductive "top down" analysing the data (Maquire & Delahunt,2017). According to Braun & Clarke (2022), "codes are the building blocks of analysis in reflexive TA capturing meaning relevant to the question" (p.52). Codes in fact are labels for units of text. At this stage I manually coded the text, using an open coding approach that is data-driven, as I did not have pre-set theory driven codes. Byrne (2021) recommends that "codes should be brief but offer sufficient detail to stand alone" (p.9). Initially in this preliminary coding phase some of my codes were chunks of data, which did not meet this format. However, through reflection and practise it gave me confidence to refine the chunks into smaller code units and assigning labels to them, thus laying the foundations. In this initial process I also used different colours highlighting to code the scripts, making them more visible and identifiable.

At this stage, two other aspects are important to weave into the process, insight, and rigour. Braun & Clarke (2022) point out that a systematic approach to coding is important for two specific reasons, "insight and rigour" (p.54). They comment that

developing insight takes time, but going through the iterative process offers deeper, captivating, less clear-cut answers and anchors us to the task rather than “leap ahead into developing themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.54).

The importance of ensuring rigour in the coding task can be achieved by ensuring systematic engagement to see the “meaning and patterning across the entire dataset, so theme development is based on a robust and detailed analysis of interrogation” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.54), and, importantly, as they comment to “avoid the accusation of cherry-picking” (p.54). At this stage in the reflexive TA process, I found it very helpful to share my drafts with my two doctoral supervisors who gave me in-depth feedback on my coding approach, analysis, data presentation and suggestions for development, which helped my focus, as well as reassuring.

An example of preliminary coding of one of the participants’ transcriptions can be found at Appendix 13, p.347.

4.9.4 Phase three: Search for Themes

Moving onto phase three occurs is when all relevant data has been coded. Braun, Clarke & Rance (2014, p.77) assert a theme in reflexive TA “is a pattern of shared meaning organised around a central concept” in your research data. As the researcher I was actively interpreting the data and looking across the whole dataset for similarities in meaning and patterning to cluster them into what constituted a theme (Braun & Clarke 2006; 2013; 2022). Bryne (2021) points out that similar to codes there is no right number of themes in a data set.

To facilitate the process and to evaluate the link between the codes and potential themes and sub-themes, as well as their connection to the research questions, I then undertook some manual mapping that helped me to see visibly the possible connections between the codes and preliminary themes. It also was an aid to how these applied to specific participant’s scripts and number frequency.

By the end of this task, I had generated a significant number of themes. However, Braun & Clarke (2012) point out that whereas some data ends up as a theme, some

themes may need to be removed later, and it is important that the researcher fully explores the wealth of data generated and does not miss some of the rich sources.

An example of preliminary coding and themes from Q.2. of one of the participants' transcriptions. This can be found at Appendix 14, p.350 -Participant Stewart - Q.2 What is your understanding of CPD?

4.9.5 Phase four: Review Themes

To aid the researcher with the task of reviewing potential themes Braun & Clarke (2012, p.65) have set out a list of questions to address (see page reference for list). I found this helpful when undertaking this task. This is a two-phase process; one reviewing the themes to see if they should/could be combined and looking at sub-themes. In conjunction with this task, I scrutinised the various coded data and cross referenced this with the selected segments of data to ensure that they supported the themes.

By this time, I had generated a substantial amount of coded data and made aids, such as the mapping tables and grids, to systematically organise my coding and themes to ascertain their connection and whether they were answering the research and semi-structured interview questions. It was helpful also at this stage to draw on my theoretical framework of the four key philosophical thinkers, Mills (1959), Freire (1970), Fromm (1976), and Foucault (1977) and review their theoretical constructs, ideas, and their connection to the participants' text their ideas and data set. The reliability and validity of my research was a key factor and as I was using manual methods, I also used a triangulation method to confirm findings of codes and themes from data. To achieve this, I also used Microsoft Word to check whether the themes selected were drawn from across all the data set to ensure I was capturing all relevant participants' perspectives.

4.9.6 Phase five: Define Themes.

In the phase of defining and naming themes, which need to be clearly defined and labelled. I found Braun & Clarke's (2022) list of reflexive questions helpful when evaluating each theme (p.111). Patton (1990, cited in Byrne, 2021) points out that the test should be, does it "provide a coherent and internally consistent account of the data that cannot be told by the other themes" (p.1407). The task of defining themes is what Braun & Clarke (2006) describe as essentially to "identify the 'essence' of what each theme is about" (p.92). By reflexively examining the theme holistically in terms of what it is saying, does it make sense and how it relates to other themes within the data set, meaning it should be "unique and specific" and highlights why this extract of data is interesting and important to the reader (Bryne, 2021).
In order to evaluate the selected themes, I reviewed them against this guidance and went back and forth to the various data extracts I had selected from across the data set. Taking an iterative approach, I re-interrogated these to ensure they supported this theme, why each was relevant and their connection to the specific research questions. This developed over the writing of the chapter findings, discussion, and conclusion, as well as in supervision with my doctoral supervisors.

4.9.7 Phase six: Writing Up The Report

The final phase of the reflexive thematic analysis of the research data was to write up a detailed, structured, logical, report that drew on the richness and complexity of the themes generated from across the dataset that linked to the research questions. It was important to select segments of data that were insightful and were provide with an interpretative commentary that linked them to a broader academic understanding or field of inquiry (Braun and Clarke,2024).

This was particularly challenging as I wanted to do justice to the participants' perspectives by ensuring that my interpretation of the data fully represented the participants' views to heighten their visibility and illuminate their voices.

An example of one of the posters I presented at Brunel University Conference as a means of disseminating information regarding the study, including preliminary findings, can be found at Appendix 15, p.352.

4.9.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter follows on from the debate around the theoretical framework and setting the scene for the research context. Initially it gave a brief history and overview of major influences within the research field, followed by an overview of methodological approaches. The chapter set out the ontological and epistemological positions that influenced and were relevant to choice of research strategy and selection of methods. The chapter plots its way through the various methodological processes to present the structured process undertaken. This included, participant recruitment, methods of data collection, sampling and size, as well as process used for data analysis to the research writing conclusion (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012; 2013; 2022) The chapter also gives an outline of the ethical considerations, researcher positionality and other researcher considerations that needed to be addressed to aid research validity.

The next chapters present the research findings, integrated with discussion. This draws on the theoretical framework concepts, social work, social science, and political theory, as well as contemporary issues relating to social work practice.

Presentation of Research Findings and Discussion

Chapter Five: Continuing Professional Development

5.1 Introduction

This, and following chapters relating to the findings follow on from the methods chapter that outlined the research participants' profiles and demographic characteristics. The purpose of this chapter, and following three chapters (six, seven and eight), is to report and interpret the findings of the study simultaneously. By combining the presentation of the results with an in-depth analytical discussion, the chapters explore, not only what the data reveals, but also the significance of these findings within the broader context of social work and continuing professional development. The first chapter is structured around participants' understanding of continuing professional development; chapter six explores professionalism; chapter seven explores facilitators and enablers to CPD; and chapter eight explores barriers and challenges to CPD. The chapters analyse how the present outcomes support, extend or challenge previous research and theoretical frameworks.

5.1.1 Data from the Participants' Semi-Structured Interviews

The findings, analysis of themes, and discussion of the data were collected from semi-structured research interviews and link to the theoretical framework and other relevant theory. A semi-structured research interview schedule was designed around CPD topics to provide more flexible interviews to capture the voices of participants. The ideas emerging from the data were interpreted using a narrative approach (Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou, 2013) and Thematic Analysis using Braun and Clarke (2006) to investigate social worker participants' perceptions on a variety of areas by collecting open-ended data on the semi-structured questions to answer the overarching research question,

> *How do Social Workers navigate Continuing Professional Development to sustain and develop their practice and professionality identity?*

One of the advantages of using a flexible approach over structured interviews is that allows participants more influence over how the conversation proceeds, as well as

the researcher to modify the interview and ask follow-up questions where applicable (Robson, 2011).

As previously indicated the semi-structured interviews commenced with introductions, followed by an overview and objectives of the research project, as well as the process of the interview. Initially there was a focus on the first question where participants were asked about their career journey into social work, where they gave an overview of their personal history/biography and aspects of their career to date, which are covered in data in the above chapter.

Following on from this I commenced with asking participants the initial question, 'What is your understanding of CPD?' This gave participants an opportunity to discuss this from their own perspective, as well as different angles and components that constitute CPD. In the social work profession, CPD is not a new initiative. It has been a feature of post-qualifying practice in different shapes and forms since the 1960s and is interchangeable with phrases such as post-qualifying training, professional learning, professional education, and life-long learning to name a few.

The findings are illustrated by using quotes from the participants' narratives within the semi-structured interviews, drawing on Braun and Clarke's model as set out in the previous chapter, validating the emerging themes and findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2022). All names of participants have been given pseudonyms and descriptions of locations have been changed to preserve anonymity.

5.1.2 Theme: Participants' Understanding of Continuing Professional Development

Data presented in this chapter gives an overview of participants perspective of CPD, and how they mediated this alongside their day-to-day practice.

As CPD is compulsory for social workers, 100% (n=21) of participants had a clear view about what CPD meant for them and their respective role. Some participants gave more in-depth accounts of how they managed this responsibility alongside their practice. A key theme and specially mentioned in interviews by threequarters (n=16) (76%), was Social Work England regulations (2019) and the need to comply with CPD requirements to continue to practise in their social work role. Other areas identified included updating of skills and knowledge, research, legislative and policy awareness,

as well as personal and career development. Many participants also expressed the view that it was incumbent on organisations to provide a range of opportunities for self/career development particularly to encourage retention of staff and satisfaction, bearing in mind current staffing concerns.

Stewart, an experienced practitioner, framed CPD as combination of varied tasks throughout a career coupled with the need to assimilate material into practice and reflect on learning. His approach was focused with him pointing this out in the following commentary:

> CPD, for instance, enhances your understanding of current issues; making sure that you are familiar with recent research and theory enters your practice. Also, that you are reflective in how you practice and how you assimilate these new methods into how you work. So, I guess that's about keeping learning…whatever you do, it's about developing new skills and keeping that going throughout your career and over time.

Whereas Cath, similarly experienced, conveyed in her narrative that she had undertaken a lot of CPD throughout her career, yet stressed the importance of continuing to engage with new initiatives and consolidating existing knowledge conveying her perspective:

> With CPD, I think you've always got to keep yourself in check and refreshed. I don't know how much new stuff we can learn because a lot has come out and been done and learnt but I know there's always aspects of new practices that are interesting especially like systemic work and so forth. I think it's really important that you keep yourself focused and refreshed on your professional development and consolidate what you already know as well as looking for new stuff.

On the other hand, Jessi, an independent social worker, CPD had a dual function, not only to inform her own practice and, through a humanistic, Freirean (1970) lens, cascading information to service users to support empowerment (Beresford and Croft, 1993) and self-determination (Biestek,1961). The values perspective was woven into her day-to-day practice (PCF, 2018, Domain 2), and illustrated in the following narrative:

> I try to keep my CPD up to date. I try to go to a couple of conferences a year and keep up to date by reading particularly research around the different cases I have but the spectrum is so wide. So, part of the purpose of it is to give me information but also so I can sign-post people to different resources, for instance clients (service users), as well as colleagues.

Melissa likewise considered it important that knowledge and practice were up to date, especially in terms of research and the legal framework to ensure that service users were not given incorrect information and disadvantaged. It was evident she had taken on board the importance of this with her account illustrating her practice was based on professional standards (SWE, 2019) and in accordance with the ethical base of social work (PCF, 2018 Domain 2).

> I think CPD is important these days and always will be and it's important to develop yourself because things change so much. For instance, new theories crop up and the way we think and work changes. So, you need to make sure that you're up to date with what's going with all the research and legislation. It's important, as if you are not up to date. Your practice might not be good really. You may be doing something you should not or giving people the wrong advice.

Jessi's and Melissa's commentaries and approaches to practice link to Freirean theme of conscientization (Freire,1970), upholding the core values of social work through empowering, relationship-based practice (Ruch, 2005). Both also work within what Beck (1992) calls the 'risk society': a recurring tension where social workers have to manage risk alongside operating in a profession framed by a media blame culture (Jones, R.,2012; Stanfield and Beddoe, 2013; Ixer, 2014; Warner, 2017; Leedham, 2022).

Seb placed a high value on undertaking CPD and being able to evidence his knowledge, skills, and competence within the multi-disciplinary team where he worked. He used CPD as a conduit to achieve advancement in his career and maintain his professional status, as well as provide service users with contemporary knowledge and interventions, underpinning his practice with social work values (PCF, Domain 2; SWE Standards, 2019). He positively asserted:

> For me, personally, I see CPD as kind of as an activity, or a learning process, whether formal, or informal, that kind of helps you to develop yourself, acquire new knowledge and skills to be kind of current with whichever professional skills and update yourself to work in whatever situation you find yourself in as a social worker…I make sure I keep up to date and equip myself…

It is recognised that professions, such as social work and social care, have a high risk of stress and burn out, particularly prevalent because of the transformative changes in social work practice due to societal and political changes (Jones and Novak, 1993, cited in Lloyd, King, and Chenoweth, 2002). Practitioners are encouraged to build resilience through developing "resourcefulness, flexibility effective coping" in order to respond to the challenges they face (Grant and Kinman, 2020, p.4; Ravalier, 2019).

Seb's "found wanting" framing echoes of Whittaker and Harvard (2016) observations of a form of 'defensive practice' to cover himself and less open to challenge.

Lucy, who had been promoted as assistant team manager, initially described CPD as being "a requirement of her professional registration" but when on to expand this further with the following narrative:

> …it is much more than that. It is about keeping our practice relevant and keeping up to date with relevant research or areas of development in general and keeping myself developed. I've always got this think about …what's next? So, for me that is a big thing. I always think I can do better, not that I am terrible, but I think always there is something to learn. I am curious so if something comes up that is unfamiliar to me, I will actively find out what I can about it. Yes, I am always seeking out opportunities….and if something catches my interest I will go and do some reading about it.

Lucy's professional curiosity (Munro, 2011; Burton and Revell, 2018), keep her practice alive amid challenges and pressures in social work practice. Her account reminded me of Bandura's (1994) construct of mastery, where working through goals and challenges, becoming successful, and through this building self-efficacy and believing in herself that sustains individuals to persevere when faced with challenging demands, which is fundamental in social work practice. Her account illustrates Foucault's (1963) docile body: a pliable object who has internalised the imperative to improve and develop, self-disciplining to ensure compliant and up to date. Cassie conveyed a similar tension between obligation and self-direction, capturing this in the following view:

> CPD to me is in two parts. So, you've got the part of CPD where it's mandatory, for instance, there is the Social Work England regulation where there is the expectation that you will do X amount of CPD a year and you now have to complete that online, for your registration. But what I've always thought of as CPD is that it is something for you, your personal development, your career, and you know it is really important to keep up with research and training up so you're up to date with everything, does that make sense? There's the part where I have to do it (mandatory training) and then the part where I want to do it because of the things that I'm interested in, rather than I need to.

Tom likewise saw CPD as a conduit to self and personal development, advancement to his career, but also regulatory function, conveying his perspective as follows:

> Thinking about CPD, personally it has helped me to develop myself professionally, also increased my knowledge base and assisted me with development opportunities. The department and professional body…currently

> Social Work England (SWE) also requires us to update our knowledge and skills to practice. But for me I think I have advanced in my career because of my CPD and demonstrated my willingness to learn and in so gained skills and knowledge.

Elsa took a broader view locating CPD in everyday practice, rather than in discrete training events, but also highlighting the bureaucratic edge of registration requirements, citing her views in the following narrative:

> ... I think that CPD is not just necessarily blocks of training on courses that you've gone on, but it is more every day than that. It's having opportunities to just generally develop and to learn, which I think in social work you do all the time. I think it's quite interesting that there's this idea that CPD is something separate to what you're doing on a daily basis, because I think we are always adapting and developing. We are kind of doing bits of research and kind of thinking about things in a different way, because that is the nature of the work. There is also a requirement to continue to do CPD to be registered and demonstrate that by putting in two pieces of CPD and reflecting on these….to me it feels quite tick-boxy…I think it is a bit like process driven…it's politically driven.

Elsa's illustration alludes to the shift to McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2000; Dustin, 2007) of SWE's CPD architecture, uniformity constructed through rules and procedures, while embedding of learning in daily work models the reflection-and-action that links to a key theme described by Freire as conscientization, which is an important skill to develop and route to achieving professionalism.

Rob, an experienced practitioner, similarly read the current CPD framework as politically driven (Jones, R., 2019) and weighted toward personal accountability (responsibilisation) rather than personal development of the social worker:

> For me CPD has been part of my development throughout my working life but for most of the time without the need for a requirement imposed by a structure imposed on the social work practitioners by government led agencies. Both Probation and Social Work practitioners in the 80s were free to exercise autonomy by employers who encouraged continuing professional development by offering a vast range of training opportunities. Our CQSW qualification training did have deficiencies due to the limited time frame of training, but the first year's practice, especially probation, was closely supervised by senior experienced officers and we had protected caseloads. It enabled me to develop skills in personal management, person-centred practice, family therapy, art therapy, hypnosis, practice teaching and when I moved on to a local authority, I undertook training as an Approved Social Worker and many other developmental opportunities…These opportunities were all without government-imposed structures, such as the Social Work England regulator. I

> have been interested in CPD and my professional development, but this has now shifted to spending more time in front of a computer complying with the imposed requirements…

Lara stressed the power that is inherent in the role of social work and importance of ensuring that decision-making was underpinned by ethics and values, core characteristics of social work practice (Banks, 1995; PCF 2018, Domain, 2 & 3; SWE, 2019). For her, staying well informed about contemporary society, especially personal troubles and that translate to public issues (Mills, 1959) was a professional duty, expressing her viewpoint as follows:

> CPD is important. I mean this is a very powerful role that we hold; we have the ability to make decisions and recommendations that are so powerful to people that I think we would be doing our profession an injustice if we weren't keeping ourselves up to date by being abreast of current thinking because the world is constantly changes. There is different legislation, different ways of living, even things like social demographics are changing where you know families aren't living together closely together anymore. I think all of these kinds of wider context issues impact on social work, and I think we have a duty to keep ourselves informed because that information informs our assessments.

Taken together, Elsa's, Rob's, and Lara's commentaries map onto Foucault's concept of governmentality, encapsulated by Brown (2015) "neoliberalism shifts the regulatory competence of the state onto 'responsible, rational' individuals" (p.43). Lara's narrative also draws on Foucault's (1963) docile bodies and on the humanistic, person-centred traditions of Freire (1970) and Rogers (1963). Foucault (1980) reminds us that power is exercised structurally and relationally, a recognition Lara works with at multiple levels of her practice.

Adam drew on his own experience and role as an Assistant Team Manager responsible for organising and running Team Meetings. He was enthusiastic about his role and wanted to work creatively and develop his team. He shared that, with the consent of the team, they had restructured meetings to include a developmental section, where there was a focus on with peer discussion on cases, working through the different issues. This collaborative approach aligns with Wenger's (1998) communities of practice and participative leadership style (Lewin, 1939), shifting away from Freire (1970) and Fromm's (1976) banking model to a more 'liberatory approach' (Roche, *et al*., 1999, cited in Saleebey and Scanlon, 2005) and the socialisation towards critical thinking in practice. Focusing specifically on Adam's views of CPD these are encapsulates as follows:

> …CPD, I guess, starting right back at the start of my career, it is you know about developing your skills and knowledge and, I guess, also you actually become wiser about your practice and more experienced. It's kind of you know, restructuring what you already know and looking at it maybe from a different way. I guess, on one hand of CPD, you've got the formal training, you know courses, and all other elements, but there's also you know kind of the informal side of it when you're learning from your colleagues and promoting a culture of learning.

Elsie, also an assistant team manager, treated her Practice Educator role as a CPD vehicle in itself – a mutual learning exchange with students:

> So, yes, for me, CPD is kind of continuing to develop new skills; particularly I like taking students as they are an excellent way for social workers as it helps them and it helps us.

Elsie's views again had echoes of Freire's (1970) critique of the Banking Model of Education, rather than the teacher being the font of all knowledge, what matters more was the importance of a shared experience that values others' perspective and knowledge. Elsie's narrative gave a clear vision about the structural reality of CPD within a busy local authority:

> I don't think anyone is going to say here is your new job and here is your training package. I think you have to explore what options there are and you have to almost create your own opportunities and think about what you need to be able to do your job properly. I don't think anything is going to be ideal because the local authorities are so busy and fast pace and it is not going to happen because the pressures are on us…you have to make your own opportunities basically; it's their (social worker) responsibility to look for it themselves.

Derek, also a Practice Educator, in his account, spoke of CPD as twin-track; one to comply with Social Work England regulations to practise but also highlighted the importance of having a professional and ethical duty to develop knowledge and skills in an ever-changing climate to meet the needs of service users (PCD 2018,Domain,2; Banks, 1995).

> CPD, I suppose, it's a necessary requirement for my registration, it is first and foremost if I think about it, an absolute essential part of it. Also, there's a professional and ethical expectation and requirement to keep up to speed with changing knowledge in the field in which we practise because it is always evolving and so you know it's also a necessary part of practice. So, there are the two parts of it…there's the sort of the necessary element for the regulator, the box ticking side of it and then there's the genuine learning development and the impact it has on your practice and for service users. I'm just finding this more and more useful as I work with students on this. There is a dual aspect of social work because, although we talk about different aspects of social work when you

> are looking at and linking it to the PCF domains, you are also doing it when you are writing a Children and Family assessment, or a legal statement for a court report, so although there are different elements both are developmental.

Derek's pedagogic stance reflects Freire's (1970) 'problem-posing approach' dialogue at the centre of learning, which Aldred and Aldred (1998) regarding this approach as offering a more effective way of learning and greater retention. Like Elsie, his developmental work with students sits within a wider neoliberal frame where responsibilisation for self-development is taken on by the practitioner (Rose,1996a, cited in Peeters, 2019).

For Naomi, a manager and Approved Mental Health Professional, the pressure of recording and submitting CPD alongside intense, stressful, responsible roles, came vividly through. However, despite this she was positive about CPD, learning and self-development. Here she describes both the positive and negative aspects and way she juggled the different roles to comply with CPD requirements, as well as her own self-development:

> When I think of CPD I get a bit of a sinking feeling because I think I'm probably not writing things down enough that I'm doing but not recording. I am not logging onto Social Work England site and putting much on there; or not doing as much as I could. So, as I said there's a bit of a sinking feeling about all that stuff that's on my list, which haven't done, and it's gone down the priority list. But there is also the other side you know. What do I want to learn? What am I interested in and then there's the developmental side, which is, of course, what it's really about isn't it? But I am now also a practising Approved Mental Health Professional. This is monitored really closely especially that I am practising legally. So I am, therefore, more inclined to make sure I maintain that side of things and do what has to be done… I feel it is such an important thing to keep up to date because the Approved Mental Health Professional role is such a - it's right on the extremes, isn't it? Of course, the social work representative side is important, and it's important to know your legal duties, so I suppose I've prioritised these over all else, rightly, or wrongly.

From the data of Naomi's comprehensive narrative, it was evident she was subjected to pressures inherent in a managerialism culture (Clarke,1996; Harris, 1998), where there is surveillance of practice as described by Foucault (1977). Social work activities are shaped by use of information and communication technologies that have subjected them (social workers) to ever increasing forms of surveillance. Here these are described in the form of Social Work England, as well as internal auditing and monitoring through electronic records. Additionally, Naomi's description links to

governmentality (Foucault,1980) where she is an agent of the state reproducing dominant state discourses. In addition, in her practice Naomi is under scrutiny from several quarters, the state, her employer, as well as Socia Work England. Naomi has taken on the mantle of neoliberalism as an individual governing self by self, links to what Foucault describes as “A gaze that is, always receptive to management control” that “catches all” (Foucault, 1977, p.89, cited in Gilbert and Powell, 2010.p.14).

Zara, and Vera, both spoke positively about CPD, giving examples of how CPD had enabled them to access specific training that had increased their competence in specific areas where they wanted to improve and be more confident.
Zara described CPD as:

> Making sure you’re keeping your skills and knowledge up to date with what's happening with all kinds of aspects practice. Such as theory, different types of learning and it’s about developing yourself with different types of learning, especially working around difference. I didn't know much about different interviewing techniques or different ways of ways to be more effective in direct work with children. So, I have just been on a course to learn different techniques and better ways to inform my practice when working with difference.

Vera framed CPD as a guard against complacency, a vehicle for reflection and a thread of professional accountability, as well as being up-to-date and contemporary:

> I think, if you didn't have CPD you can always get a bit complacent, I don't know if that's the right word. But for me it helps keep my interest up because it's very easy when doing the day-to-day job not think about social work particularly in terms of you know theory around the job and it (CPD) also allows time for reflection…Like every other interest in particular it might be a couple of customers I have at present who are hoarders and doing some training around that I think would help me. It (CPD) helps me to think - Why am I doing this piece of work? How can I approach it? What can I do differently? and it helps improve my practice. Being involved in social work, you know there’s something to learn all the time. You know however many years you've been doing job there are no two situations that are the same…I always feel that every case I get or take on I always learn something new…I think it's good as it helps you develop as a social worker…I suppose our professional accountability also comes together.

Dave, a very experienced practitioner and teacher, spoke of learning from others but also that he valued the new SWE requirement for one of the CPD pieces to be a reflective peer session. Halton, Powell, and Scanlan (2015) in their research refer to the importance to facilitate peer supervision as “the need for trust-building and for the development of a cohesive team structure that supports participants” (p.117). Several

participants noted that the shift to virtual training due to Covid 19 restriction had eroded the informal, face-to-face exchange they considered most generative. Dave illustrated his views as follows:

> I think CPD is important whatever experience you have. You are just trying to keep up with it all. Research for me is the main thing about training, as it is important across my various roles, as a teacher (practice), tutor, and practitioner. Also, it is important going to training events and meeting other professionals working in the same field and comparing and sharing ideas and so forth. It is a benefit doing CPD for me, as is the learning from other practitioners, hopefully getting ideas as well…it gives you credibility doesn't it if you've done training and used it? Also, it (CPD) is a requirement of re-registration, so it is helpful also to that. I liked the peer supervision requirement as it meant a good opportunity to have a peer discussion on a piece of work, which is a positive element of re-registration.

Similarly, Milli's views echoed the value of multidisciplinary peer exchange alongside a heightened awareness of organisational and societal context. These themes link to the YouGov (2021) survey, which highlights similar reasons to Milli:

> For me, I look and view CPD, as it's about improving and continuing your career as a social worker by enhancing your skills, with what is new and relevant. In the last kind of years what's been really very relevant in my field of practice is understanding how Gangs' work, you know the County Lines and drugs. And keeping yourself up to date with knowledge of the drug scene, what I'd like to say is 'ahead of the trends.' And, also, be able to access and kind of share your thoughts and ideas in a multidisciplinary context is important.

Sara outlined CPD as an important route to professional growth with an ultimate goal of 'being the best social worker' she could. A position that runs counter to social workers' experience and fear of being 'demonised' by the press culture allegations of poor practice or wrongdoing (Cohen, 1972; Leedham, 2022). Sara illustrates how she has navigated this in the following narrative:

> For me, there are different parts of it (CPD). There's training activities and learning opportunities that I think support professional growth and focuses on maintaining my knowledge. I ensure I'm up to date with law, policy, social issues, and research and ensure that my skills are relevant and they continue to be enhanced throughout my career. I think this really enables me to be the best social worker that I can be. I think it's important, and it means taking time out of my day-to-day practice, to take up opportunities to learn and reflect, which I think is really important, and this helps develop my skills.

Importantly, in Sarra's narrative she highlights her aspiration to be the best social worker she could in practice. Her aspiration correlates with other participants' views within this research, as well as those surveyed on behalf of Social Work England (2020), and highlighted by Halton, Powell, and Scanlan (2015) as a motivation for

undertaking CPD. Sara's account returns to Freire (1970) terms as conscientization – "critical consciousness" - which is woven into practice (PCF, 2018, Domain 6) and connects toward what Fromm (1976) calls the 'being' mode of professional development.

5.2 Chapter Summary

Reading across the participant cohort's perspectives, service users' needs and social work values and ethics (PCF, 2018 Domain 2) they sat at the centre of participants' thinking and practice. The aim of equity and partnership working with service users (Beresford, 2012, 2016; King-Owen, 2020; YouGov,2021; Duddington, Gowar and Wall, 2023) was a thread that connected otherwise diverse accounts, as was the conviction that effective interventions depend on continued upskilling across a range of practice areas.

The data also illustrates how participants have been socialised and shaped by the principles of neoliberalism, what Foucault (1977) terms governmentality. This socialisation begins in initial social work education and is reinforced through organisational surveillance and the disciplinary architecture imposed by SWE, embedding what Brown (2015) describes as the shift of "the regulatory competence of the state onto 'responsible, rational' individuals" (p.43). The balance of power and self-responsibility has moved from the organisation or state to the individual: participants' actions repeatedly demonstrate active self-governance, the responsibilisation that Rose (1996a) describes.

A central point was that compliance with SWE was not the motivation participants foregrounded. Whilst the regulator's role is significant and registration is non-negotiable, the data indicates that the majority of CPD was a conduit for personal and career development and a major contributory factor to enhancing competence, practice, interventions with service users and a sense of professionalism. Participants recognised the changing context of social work – global, political and policy influences, and identified an ongoing need to develop knowledge, skills, and contextual awareness to practise effectively in a diverse field.

The next chapter will explore the theme of professionalism and sub-themes in more depth.

Chapter Six: Professionalism

6.1 Introduction

This section integrates the findings and discussion relating to the participants' perceptions of professionalism and its inter-relationship with Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Professionalism was a key theme emerging explicitly from the data, referred to by the majority of participants as a central aspect of their role and identity with the remainder addressing it implicitly in their narratives. Whether social work is a profession or an occupation has been a contested question for over a century, beginning with Flexner's (1915) speech and doubts that it did not meet the criteria to be called a profession, which put it in a nebulous position that was further questioned by Etzioni (1969) who suggested social work came into the realm of semi-profession on the grounds that it did not meet the educational and autonomy criteria associated with established professions for example those of doctors and lawyers (Etzioni,1969).

Over time however there has been a progressive shift for social workers to increase their educational standards, training, and qualifications resulting in degree entry since 2003. The degree status has firmly rooted social work as achieving professional status, as well as protection of the title "Social Worker" since 2005 (Care Standards Act, 2000).

Tovey (1994, p.8) observed "professionalism and education are inextricably linked". Furthermore, he went onto also emphasise that "professions and professionals are socially constructed statuses; and education plays a key role in achieving and securing that status and marking off lines of differentiation from non-professionals" (cited, by Halton, Powell, and Scanlan, 2015, p.9). The partnership between education and practice-based experience are important components of social work training and underpin professional status. These areas are important considerations in the context of social work professional learning and development. Social work is an internationally recognised profession that is accountable to service users, the public, employers, and professional regulators (IFSW,2014).

Professionalism is a key component of a social worker's role. Social workers who wish to practise in England using the title of Social Worker are required to register with Social Work England (2019) and need to evidence and demonstrate that their

practice and behaviour meet Social Work England Professional Standards (Social Work England, 2019). Professionalism is central to social work practice, the requirements being set out in the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) Domain 1 descriptor (BASW, 2018). Whilst the PCF is not a statutory requirement of practice it is overwhelmingly used in practice by social workers, employers, and the profession to develop and evaluate practice. For instance, domain one outlines the requirements and expectations of being a professionally registered social worker in terms of behaviour, accountability to service users, employers, the public, representing the profession, safeguarding its reputation, as well as be accountable for their practice.

6.2 Theme: Professionalism

Reflecting on the overarching research question *How do Social Workers navigate Continuing Professional Development to sustain and develop their practice and professionality identity?* The semi-structured interview questions were framed around CPD areas from different angles that encouraged the participants to explore CPD from different perspectives. Responding to the question "What is your understanding of CPD?" two-thirds (n=14) (67%) of participants referred explicitly to Professionalism as an important motivation for undertaking CPD. For the remainder, the link was more implicit in their narratives. Exploring participants' perspectives in more depth, the majority spoke confidently about what professionalism meant to them, highlighting key factors, such as building on their knowledge and skills, assimilating new methods, awareness of societal issues and changes, reflecting on their practice, integrating new learning into practice. Key components were opportunities to keep on learning and developing throughout their social work career, as well as, principally, being accountable for their practice.

Stewart, an experienced social worker manager with over thirty years in various roles, emphasised the link between professionalism and CPD:

> It's, I mean, social work is a profession, you've got to belong to a professional body and part of belonging to any professional body is about making sure that you are performing at a certain level and part of that is your continuing professional development.

Stewart was clear that to undertake a career in social work, practitioners needed to be reflective and committed to learning, emphasising that, in his view, there was a

distinct difference between a professional career in social work and other work, pointing this out by the following comments:

> (Professionalism) needs to be self-responsibility …There is a difference being a professional; it is not just about like working in a supermarket, doing your work, and coming out and being able to switch off, I suppose it is about keeping on learning.

Similarly, Lara, who had just over six years' experience and recently moved to a manager role, echoed her viewpoint of seeing the role as a vocation explaining:

> I can only answer for myself, but for me it is not just a job, it is more of a vocation. If I considered it was just a job, I would not put in all the hours that I do…if you only did the job for the hours, you are paid you are not going to be a particularly effective as a social worker. So, yes, it depends on the individual and their journey, their personal commitment and integrity to the role.

Lara's account indicates that she has been socialised into the norms and values of the organisation (Durkheim, 1893) and has assimilated what Foucault (1977) describes as governmentality, alongside retaining personal autonomy, she has taken on the self-governance and responsibility consistent with neoliberal principles.

Dave, currently a self-employed practice educator with over thirty-five years' experience in social work, asserted a close link between CPD and being a professional commenting:

> CPD is about professionalism, isn't it? You know you can't really claim to be any type of professional unless you're prepared to keep learning and developing.

Derek too emphasised the importance of the connection between professionalism and learning, especially in a fast-changing profession, but for him ethics were centre stage (PCF 2018, Domain 2; SWE Standards, 2019), as well as personal accountability to retain registration, illustrating this in the following narrative:

> ...there's a professional and ethical expectation and requirement to keep up to speed with changing knowledge in the field in which we practice, especially as practice is always evolving…So you know it's a necessary part of practice both from a practical point of view, as well as being able to register as a social worker, and for me the link between being ethical and my professional practice.

Whilst Melissa, a newly appointed team manager, observed that:

> CPD will be a big part of it because it shapes us as professionals.

Whereas Seb, who worked in a Multi-Disciplinary Mental Health Team as a Senior Social Work Practitioner, had a previous career in nursing, before moving on to gaining initial and post-qualifying qualifications in social work. He emphasised the importance of CPD, not only to his social work practice, but also personally to what he described as developing himself as a 'human being.' His perspective links to Elsie's and Melissa's accounts and requirements of social work values and ethics (PCF, Domain, 2018; SWE Standard 4), as well as his practice being underpinned by Rogers' (1961) humanistic approach. Seb went onto surmise the importance of CPD as professional learning and its relevance when collaborating with other professionals commenting:

> I don't wait for them (organisation) to come to me; I look for these courses, and I book them because I want to be up to date, be current. I don't want to be 'found wanting' in my knowledge and skills in the profession…yes, I want to keep developing.

Nearly half of the participants' surveyed (n=10) (48%%) considered it was incumbent on social workers to be able to develop their knowledge and skills to keep up with societal changes, contemporary issues, and changes in practice that were arising. They considered they needed upskilling across a range of areas to enable them to provide effective interventions and work in partnership with service user (Beresford, 2016; 2019b; YouGov,2021; Burns, McGinn, and Fitzsimmons, 2023). Additionally, there was a recognition by participants that CPD had been as a vehicle for self-development and was a major contributory factor to advancing in their career. This was illustrated by Elsie, an assistant team manager, with nine years' experience described how CPD had helped her career to date commenting:

> Learning, it's kind of, you know, a forever moving feast but I feel like what I've had thus far has got me to where I am sufficiently, and I am consolidating. If at some point something might come up, I might ask, Do I want to go there? If okay, I want to go there I'll create a new action plan with goals……For instance, pursing your dream, learning more about it, it's kind of not only about career, but also about an individual's kind of desires. I don't know if that's the right word, but we want to be the best that we can be at what we do…some people might not want to be the best, but they might be happy where they are, that's fine, but you still have to want to develop, I suppose.

Data indicated that over two-thirds of participants (n=16) (76%) were committed to career/self-development through CPD, though all highlighted that this was not an

easy task to achieve within their core time. For instance, they cited many organisational and personal challenges they faced, particularly juggling their busy work schedules to prioritise CPD courses, coping with crises and having space to withdraw from day-to-day work to attend training. Another factor raised as a concern was having sufficient time post-CPD training opportunities to reflect on learning and then to be able to weave this into their practice that would increase their confidence and competence, and their learning would be of benefit to service users. Melissa, spoke candidly about the positive benefits of CPD to professionalism and professional identity but also the self-responsibility it imposed on her. Her reflections link to the Foucault's (1977) concept of governmentality, where individuals are shaped through neoliberal states to be compliant and take responsibility for themselves, behaviour, and actions. Melissa, giving her viewpoint she remarked:

> So, CPD will be a big part of it because it shapes us as professionals and as a professional. I think I need to be very, how can I put it, to have this thick skin sometimes um, yeah, but at the same time be very sensitive to what's going on around you, especially what you do and what you say to service users and other professionals.

The account given by Melissa also emphasises the importance she attributes to social work being underpinned by person-centred and relationship-based practice, integrating key components, such as empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard into practice (Rogers,1951; Ruch, 2005). Additionally, this perspective links to the concepts of Freire (1970) on humanisation, as a core belief in social work, which is based on equality, worth and dignity of all individuals and correlates with the descriptors in Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) Domain 2 (BASW, 2018), which sets out expectations around values and ethics.

Debra, a social worker, who had five years' experience in practice, though not continuous, talked positively about different opportunities of CPD she had experienced whilst in post but also areas that she felt were deficient in her prequalifying training that left her under-confident to deal with practice issues. Whilst the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme offered scope for new learning and development following qualification, she considered work-based opportunities could be expanded to enable newly qualified practitioners to gain more 'first-hand experience,' particularly from more experienced and expert social workers in different teams. She described CPD as:

> Like work training you do…. anything really that helps you learn and kind of develop your expertise as a professional. I suppose then its ongoing and open-ended; It's about self-development.

Being able to operate as a confident, knowledgeable professional was particularly important to Debra. Her low confidence in her ability and lack of learning opportunities had been compounded by a serious bout of ill-health and on return to work being allocated a high-risk complex case beyond her experience and knowledge so was taking positive action to develop her different aspects of her learning. It was evident Debra wanted to attain more in her practice with her narrative appearing to link to what Gast and Bailey (2014, cited by Boahen and Wiles, 2019, p.62) describe this as "conscious competence", the stage before competence becomes second nature. This was the stage Debra appeared to be at, whereas she wanted to be able to integrate all the different aspects into her practice so she could feel confident in her ability.

Nearly two thirds of participants (n=14) (67%) spoke of the relevance of CPD helping them to increase their knowledge and skills that could help them improve outcomes for service users with whom they work, which is the goal of interventions but not a high feature in social work literature and under-developed (Moriarty & Manthorpe, 2016; Proctor, 2017). Milli encapsulated this in the following quote:

> For me, CPD, is about improving, continuing your career as a social worker, enhancing your skills, learning what is new and relevant and keeping yourself up to date. It is about being professional and, most importantly, questioning yourself about how things can be changed to get better outcomes ….and those aspirations for young people. We can only have these if we are informed, as we say, 'knowledge is power.'

There are a number of strands that arise out of Milli's description of reflecting on her practice (Schön,1987), that link to what Freire (1970) describes as the concept of conscientization. Her account considers the individual needs and aspirations of people with whom she works, upholding social work values and working in an empowering way (PCF, 2018, Domain 2: SWE Standards, 2019).

Similarly, Vera, a senior social worker with sixteen years in practice, explained that for her CPD had many positive strands. From developing her career opportunities through specialist training programmes, to working with client groups who had

specific issues, such as hoarding or neglect. She felt that she needed to develop knowledge and expertise to effectively practice, pointing out:

> …however, many years you have been doing the job (social work), no two situations are the same…. each case I get I learn something new, about what I am doing and why I am doing it. So, I think it's good because it does allow time for reflection, thinking and CPD helps you to develop as a social worker….

Vera's narrative reminded me of Freire's (1970) work on conscientization and the importance for having time and space for opportunities to attain what Witkin, (1998) describes as richer understanding of others' perspectives.

Elsa, who had six years' experience in Children and Families, spoke of the importance of continuing to develop knowledge and your skill set, by using all areas of practice and encounters for self-development, conveying her views:

> ……whatever you are doing I think CPD, whether it's not just necessarily blocks of training or a course you have been on, but more everyday things, it is kind of having opportunities to just learn…..I think it is quite interesting that there's this idea of CPD being something separate to what you're doing on a daily basis. We are always adapting and developing and kind of doing bits of research and thinking about things in a different way because that is the nature of our work…

What was evident from Vera, Milli and Elsa's accounts were their self-development, and learning did not only extend to formalised CPD opportunities, but they used different case scenarios to learn and develop themselves with specialist knowledge. Workplace learning is a recognised key vehicle as being influential to social worker learning (Ferguson, 2021). Grant, McCulloch, Daly and Kettles, (2020) accounts' observe the importance of social workers learning from colleagues, both in formal and informal professional networks with this also central to developing professional identity and learning the specific nuances of practice (Hood, 2015).

The need to critically reflect on presenting issues, especially to look beneath the surface, is a vital skill to attain to weigh up decision-making and should be a feature of supervision (Freire, 1970; Fook and Askeland, 2007; Davys and Davys, 2010). In our interview Cath illustrated the importance of this:

> I like to keep myself up to date with research and refresh actually. For example, I recently went on a really good training with an organisation that was really a therapeutic experience. It was based on Serious Case Reviews but done entirely with sand, no flipcharts or power-point. It was a really powerful in what

> it taught me. It reminded me to be curious and refocus on the child, and I think that's professional development and professionalism.

Similarly, Lucy when discussing how she approaches her practice and CPD recounted:

> …I am curious, so if something comes up that is unfamiliar to me, I will actively find out what I can about it…I also raise things in group supervision as I think this is part of my professional development as well, as well as with my supervisees.

Another participant Lara, a team manager, also spoke of the challenges and interest of keeping up to date with current research and recommendations from Serious Case Reviews and Enquiries and cascading down information to team members. She spoke positively of providing informal learning opportunities for team members through mentoring and direct involvement to offer support and be a role model. Whilst not making specific reference to professional curiosity as a term, this was implicit in her comments:

> I usually try to get out and about with social workers as face-to-face work can provide opportunities for learning and raising research in individual supervision and with the team.

Closely linked to professionalism was the participants' commitment to professional curiosity in practice. This is an area that has been identified as a deficit in social work in Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) (Now called Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews) (LCSPRs) on child deaths, especially identified by Munro (2010, 2011) and Laming (2009) as well as raised in literature by Burton and Revell (2018). The data highlights that participants had taken on board this professional message and it had become integral to professional thinking.

6.2.1 Professional Status:

A second sub-theme was professional status where nearly half (n=10) (48%) of the participants gave examples of their professional status not being recognised, particularly when working alongside other health professionals in Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDAs) and Multi-Agency (MA) settings. One participant Tom, who had seven years' experience of working with a range of service users including Learning Disabilities, Mental Health and Adult care and had recently been promoted to assistant team manager cited several examples where he felt social workers were "marginalised and disempowered" by their experiences when working in a MDT

experience, commenting, “It’s the way social workers are put in relation to other health team professionals.” He questioned whether it was because initial social work training was generic and not focused on a specialism, commenting, “let me give you an example”:

> There was a psychologist who would always push through what their views were around a particular individual who had learning disabilities and their assessment was based entirely on the medical model, but they would be expecting a robust care package to be implemented by the social worker. When you explained that you were looking at the action plan from a social model point of view and wanting to engage the individual in the plan and enabling them. However, they were resistant, and your views and social workers were marginalised, as others had more power.

Tom’s response was to undertake additional CPD, including Best Interests Assessor (Mental Health Capacity Act, 2005) and Liberty Protection Safeguards training observing of the impact:

> The additional training I undertook gave me knowledge and confidence, not only did it help my professional identity, status and credibility but established my authority as a professional.

Seb also worked in a Multi-Disciplinary Team in Mental Health, where he was the Senior Practitioner of the team. He had a supportive manager who encouraged him to seek out CPD opportunities. Seb explained his perspective and approach to CPD and how this facilitated his professional status:

> I am motivated to undertake CPD as when you look at mental health it is a complex area. I find positiveness reading, researching, and equipping myself as we do not only work with adults with mental health issues, but we also work with the families as well and our colleagues and students in children and families, so we need to know about all aspects of mental health. So, reading research is important for me as it enables me to look at the natural family unit and to facilitate this knowledge to colleagues, like doctors and nurses so that this can help us to understand and work holistically and link with other professionals. We need to be able to give advice and direct them, bearing in mind what the social model covers, and equally take into consideration the medical model as well because both need to work together to get an outcome.

Here, Seb felt his proactiveness in developing his knowledge and skills promoted his professionalism, empowered him, but also gave him a more authoritative voice.

Another participant, Sara, with eight years' experience, and promoted to senior social worker, expressed dismay that in comparison to other professionals' there was a lack of clarity of social workers' roles and, overall, they (social workers) lacked wider public recognition. Sara's views were encapsulated in the following narrative:

> I think that social workers lack recognition and identity that other professionals have. It is what we do, what the community think we do, and what the family with lived experience of social work think, it is all probably different. I still believe that in society social work is seen as a job rather than profession. And that is despite us being qualified, CPD and the professional registration that we have. CPD, I believe, expands individual capabilities but also keeps us grounded and helps us in the field that we're working in. Um… and I don't think that can happen just by training and qualifying a social worker alone.

However, recent research by Social Work England in their role as Social Work Regulator commissioned research focusing on public perception which indicated that 96% of those interviewed considered social workers provided an essential service, with 92% indicating that they had a unique role in society (YouGov, 2020). This research indicates a positive change of attitudes although this is not always reflected in the media.

Similarly participant Adam mentioned the importance of CPD opportunities to his development and status as a social worker explaining:

> Yeah, I think that CPD opportunities are part of it. It is also about a revalidation of what you do and your role. I think you get a bit onto autopilot sometimes in the field and you just you know do your work, do your assessments and everything else ……sometimes you need to take step back and to think really about the significance and seriousness of some of the stuff that you do and that's when I find training, particularly when I am doing training externally with other professionals, it just gives you a different lens and a different way of looking at your work and what you do day-to-day. It has an important impact on yourself and role.

Cath, a service manager with over twenty years' experience in various Children Service roles, drew attention to the structural inequalities in entitlement to study leave between social workers and other professionals working in the same statutory sector, enunciating this as follows:

> One concern is no study time for social workers. For instance, when I was heading the Multi-Disciplinary Team with lots of other professionals, - such as the Educational Psychologists, who had the same regulator as us - they got

> fifteen study days a year for their CPD. They hold onto their professional status and are well-regarded…whereas our social workers were not entitled to anything.

Cath also illustrated the importance of professional knowledge as a basis for asserting the social work voice, recounting a domestic abuse in which “up to date” legislation and how it is implemented enables you to speak up at strategy meetings and challenge practice. Cath also raised professional status from a different angle and the need for individuals to strive for this to feel confident and authoritative. She stressed the importance of being able to demonstrate professionalism in interactions with other professionals, commenting “you have to be more professionalised.”

This differential situation was raised by at least half (n=10) 48% of participants especially those had experience of working in Multi-Disciplinary Teams but lacked equity regarding study time despite working with the same service-user group and facing the same challenges.

Whilst participants identified issues of marginalisation when working collaboratively with other professionals, specifically within Multi-Disciplinary Team decision making, they also gave specific examples when this also extended to their own organisation, marginalising and professionally discounting them by failing to recognise them as expert. Lucy gave an account of a Funding Panel that repeatedly required psychiatric assessments to confirm her assessment. Her views were captured in the following narrative:

> We know these young people; it is based on the traumas they have experienced and suffered, and the noted behaviours indicate they have a need for therapeutic interventions. We then have to go and get a CAMHS or psychiatric assessment when we have done an assessment identifying trauma and attachment difficulties. It will then have to be done privately, so we are pulled out and they say exactly the same thing that we had said and then they’ll fund it. Sorry, I sound a bit glib, but it is really frustrating and demoralising.

Conversely, another acting team manager with seventeen years’ experience who was also a qualified Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) spoke about the power and authority vested in this role and how this contrasted when she reverted to her role as social worker trying to attain resources for service-users, she asserted:

> When you are advocating for something for someone that is expensive and a bit different to what they (the organisation) had hoped it would be, it gives me authority when I am in the AMHP role. I’ve got a level of power that comes with

> that responsibility. But when I am not in that role and in a general social work role, it is a lot less. You seem to be a lot less respected there, so that's what we're trying to change.

Naomi went onto say that whilst social workers had a professional association many social workers did not belong to one, such as BASW. Whereas doctors had a British Medical Association (BMA) a professional body and union, and nurses had Royal College of Nursing (RCN), that had dual function of professional body and union. Naomi considered they were more consistent and supportive in their approaches to members and also had more professional power.

Another participant, Debra, who had limited practice experience, when discussing the role of social workers, observed, resignedly:

> We are all professionals, but we are not given the same level of kudos as say a doctor or a lawyer, it's weird because social work is a profession also.

The account given by Tom links to analysis of Foucault in the *Birth of the Clinic* (Foucault, 1963) where Foucault explores the relationship between power and knowledge and how it is exercised in medical social systems. Foucault's (1977) concept of 'the medical gaze' (p.89 cited by Gilbert and Powell, 2010, p.14) described how the patient's story is fitted into a "biomedical paradigm, filtering out what is deemed as irrelevant material" (Misselbrook, 2013). Whilst practice in medical settings has moved on considerably over the years, social workers have played a central role, particularly promoting approaches such as Person-Centred (Rogers, 1951, 1961, 1963), Strengths-Based (Saleebey,1992,1996), Relationship-based Practice (Ruch, 2005) and Trauma-Informed (Levenson, 2017) approaches have, at times, been overshadowed by hierarchical assumptions about expertise, where, as Tom's account illustrates the social worker's account illustrates the social worker perspective is largely dismissed, even though, as McPherson (2020) emphasises a rights-based approach is integral to contemporary social work practice. This aligns with research by Beddoe (2015) in New Zealand which suggests that social workers often struggle to be accepted as equals by other professionals working in the same field, with "social workers voices can be silenced or overridden" (p.21). The wider literature on negative medical representations of social work (Leedham, 2022; Koutsounia, 2023; SWE, 2023: Hanley, 2025) provides a culture. Research commissioned by SWE through YouGov (2020) on public perceptions, indicated that 96% of those surveyed considered social workers provided an essential service, and

92% considered they had had a unique role within society, suggesting that a positive shift in public attitudes that is not always reflected in media coverage. Data from the participants indicate that CPD was used strategically as a means of reasserting professional status, specifically the data from Tom, Seb, Naomi and others, often gaining specialist qualifications as a means of enhancing their authority, giving them an "authoritative voice" in inter-professional settings, and validating their credibility through the lens of "the expert" who is in control and expert in their role. The findings confirm literature the existence of marginalisation of social work and it demonstrates how participants actively use CD as a strategy for renegotiating professional status.

6.2.2 Professional Accountability and Professional Responsibility

Professional Accountability and Professional Responsibility were two important themes that ran through interviews with participants. Reviewing the data, it indicated that two-thirds (n=14) (67%) of participants mentioned these as core attributes they considered essential to being a professional social worker. They are also part of the PCF capability statement domain 1 (BASW, 2018) and a requirement Social Work England Standards (2019) to which social workers have to adhere.

In terms of accountability this was key to discussions with participants. They took this on board completely, such as accountability to service users, their organisation, public, and selves. An area frequently mentioned was the need to adapt practice to meet current challenges, particularly during Covid 19 pandemic. Participant Elsie spoke of the changes in practice and delivery of services arguing:

> If you cannot adapt then you shouldn't be continuing within the profession, because that is what we're expecting our families to do. We're expecting to go in there and say, lets create this big climate of change and if we're not able to do this ourselves or we are kind of stuck in a rut of where we are working, which again all links back to professional development. If we are not willing to change ourselves, how can we expect other people to be open to the idea of change?"

Another participant Vera also made links between CPD and professional accountability, commenting:

> I think that CPD is good to help you develop as a social worker. Certainly, it helps you keep up to date with any legislative changes, any changes in practice…I think it does help you, I suppose you analyse a bit more about what

> you are doing in your job role as you can get into the habit of just doing the job. However, it (CPD) helps you think a bit more about the purpose about what you are doing, which people don't always recognise. It is important to have professional accountability and, I think that CPD supports us do that.

On the other hand, Elsa addressed the importance of social worker accountability from the service user perspective, especially pertinent she felt when working with young people. She spoke of the importance of being transparent about why difficult decisions were being made, particularly in connection for them and their family, asserting:

> I met with a young person last week to explain what we (LA) were doing and how I had reached a decision about what I thought would be the best decision for their family. I explained how I made the decision, who I consulted, what I considered, and the research I used to underpin that decision.

She went onto say that it was not an easy meeting. She had met challenges from the young person adding:

> This young person said to me. What are the prerequisites for becoming a social worker? How do you get that responsibility? I found it challenging but then I think you know we should be held accountable and be able to show how you made the decision; not just that you are making it because you think it is the right one.

In relation to professional responsibility many participants inextricably linked CPD and professionalism, with Cath stated forthrightly remarking:

> …It is our professional responsibility to keep updating knowledge, skills, focusing and keeping our practice fresh.

Whereas in the account given by Seb he was implicit in evidencing his strong belief in professional responsibility. He described his approach as:

> ...Even when I was a mental health nurse, I did not rely on the ward staff nurse but continued to develop by going on post-graduate courses and I now do the same seeing it as my responsibility in social work.

Many participants emphasised that in CPD there was a need for organisational and regulatory compliance in order to practice but also there you needed to be self-motivated and take on personal responsibility to self-development for instance Zara, a social worker with five years' experience in Children's Services highlighted her approach in our discussions:

> For me CPD is about being proactive, keeping up to date with your skills and knowledge and with what's happening in practice. For instance, different

> theories …research, different ways to work and learning to be more effective and developing yourself; it is your responsibility to do this. I look through the training manual and see what is coming through on the emails and then put myself forward.

Another participant Cassie, an assistant team manager, had mapped out a career plan and was trying to implement this alongside achieving work/life balance to ensure she could meet her parental duties. She asserted:

> I have always thought of CPD in two parts. You've got CPD which is mandatory and the need to provide CPD evidence for SWE for your registration, which is your responsibility and your own personal development, which is your career. It is really important to keep up to date with research and training to ensure that you are up to date with everything. And, oh yes, quality is important in the part I have to do and the part I want to do because I am interested in it, and I need to do it to develop myself.

Interpreting these findings, professional accountability and responsibility emerge as the ethical hinge between the regulator the organisation, the public and the practitioner's own developmental course. Elsie's reflections speak directly to Rose's (1996a) concept of *responsibilisation* (cited in Peeters, 2019), which describes the shift to self-responsibility and self-governance characteristic of neoliberal subject. The data also illustrate the altruistic prioritisation of service user crises over scheduled CPD, a long-standing and well-documented phenomenon. Research by Lloyd, Pfeiffer, Dominish, Heading, Schmidt and McCluskey (2014) on allied health professionals' workplace CPD found a similar pattern of social workers missing developmental opportunities to respond to crises, with no organisational provision for replacement, a finding subsequently echoed in SWE YouGov (2021) survey. In high demand environments it can have negative effects on practitioners and is associated with stress and burnout (Pazer, 2025), highlighting the need for organisational interventions. The wider regulatory requirements, such as SWE Standards (2019), Codes of Ethics for Social Workers (BASW, 2021) and PCF (2018), Domain 1 reinforce professional accountability and responsibility as core requirements in contemporary social work. Alongside this is the neoliberal idea of personal autonomy and responsibility on self-care in the social work profession where the balance of power and self-responsibility has shifted to the individual (Rose, 1999; Gray, 2005).

6.2.3 Professional Identity

During the semi-structured interviews, the final question to the participants asked *How does CPD link with your professional identity (PI) as a social worker?*

All twenty-one participants (100%) expressed a view on professional identity, some implicitly mentioned its influence on shaping their professional self, and how CPD contributed to this and their career. Elsie in her narrative covered the different strands that she felt shaped her PI, asserting:

> Professional identity is very important as a social worker. I think SWE has got this right, although I don't always agree with a lot of ways the governing body support, and I say that in loose terms, social workers. I think in terms of professional identity, I think absolutely we need to have something that holds us to account for the fact what we're still able to, you know.

In discussions with Sara, she focused on the multi-dimensional aspects of identity, commenting:

> As an ambassador for the LA and using social media platforms, sharing information I actually define myself as a social worker. However, I grew up in the area in which I work, I am proud of my profession and I'm proud of what I do but I also have a right to a private life….

Sara went onto expand on recognising that each of us have multiple identities with which we are grappling, emphasising:

> I will forever be a social worker, but you know I am also a mother and wife and those are important to my identity as well.

Stewart was positive about the shift social work had made, particularly having a protected title and social work regulator body, remarking:

> …It's nice that you've got that professional identity…I certainly think that social work has become a profession, and much more over the years.

In Lucy's comments she linked Professional identity to CPD and self-responsibility, stating:

> Professional identity – I think it links back to what we were talking about earlier, the link to our professional registration. There is something about um…the need to be up to date and that things change, and research brings or tests new theories …. actually, if we practise as we did 20 years ago, we are not fulfilling our professional responsibilities as we are not necessarily taking that into

> account new thinking. It is important for us to have a strong professional identity; we need to keep changing as society is continuing to develop. Things change all the time, so we have to be in touch with what is going on…

Conversely, Derek when discussing had a more ambivalent perspective reflecting:

> I think it's a bit more nebulous than a nurse or a doctor because you've got a terrific range of different types of social workers, diversity at all levels, maturities, and that makes it feel a bit more difficult to pin down to an identity…so, I think I haven't thought that much about it. I mean I'm trying to survive as a person really day to day and just keep my head above water… be a good professional and be professional at my job.

Whereas Zara was unequivocal regarding the importance of CPD and professional identity emphasising:

> Well, I think my professional identity as a social worker kind of forms for me the whole basis of it. My professional development makes me the social worker that I am, and my practice is a result of what I've learned. So, if I hadn't had any professional development and had come from university and started and I hadn't had done any CPD I think there would be a significant difference in me as a practitioner….

Melissa highlighted concern about the negative media press reporting on social workers, for instance, the amplification of reported problems, leading to moral panics (Cohen,1972). Cohen argues that by highlighting these issues negatively in the media and drawing attention to social workers involvement they (media) are, what he has termed, as 'moral guardians of society.' Melissa considers this situation effects social workers' professional identity, and an important factor was for them (social workers) to be able to move beyond this, with her narrative emphasising this:

> I think in social work, as they say, we're damned if you do and damned if we don't. Yes, so, it's such a tricky profession. I think it's important that we do have some sort of identity and understanding of what that profession stands for…

With Jessi conceptualising identity as both knowledge and ability to know where to find resources remarking:

> Part of your professional identity is knowing where you can find resources. It is important to say if you don't know but say I know where I can find it. It is also important what training you have had to update your knowledge, skills, and awareness. These for me are part of professionalism and professional identity.

Rob emphasised the cumulative effect of specialist training, such as becoming an expert witness, practice educator, and trainer, through attending a range of external

providers, where he gained expert knowledge, which had been instrumental to his professional identity formation commenting:

> Attending specialist external training and through attendance at university courses has advanced my career development and enabled me to have the benefit of gaining expert knowledge, professional status and formed my professional identity. This has also enabled me to exercise my supervisory role within a Multi-Disciplinary Team.

For Adam he considered being a member of BASW and SWE registration validated his social worker professional identity commenting:

> I think that by making it mandatory that we register with SWE there is a recognition of the fact that we are professionals and the experts in our field, and, so, I think that is really part of our identity …..as well as belonging to BASW is also about being a professional, as well as getting access to different resources…

6.3 Chapter Summary

Interpreting these findings, professional identity emerges as multi-stranded that spans both professional and personal domains and is of pivotal importance to social workers. This data aligns closely with the literature of Dent and Whitehouse (2002, 2017) who draw attention to the inculcation of norms, values, and beliefs through socialisation in initial training to shaping of identity by collective role context of the workplace. Wiles (2013, 2017) and Webb (2016) similarly underscore the centrality of identity to contemporary social work, whilst the values base of identity is articulated and underpinned by long-standing social work ethics (Biestek, 1961; Banks, 1995, 2012; Parrott, 2006, 2014; NASW, 2014, 2021; SWE, 2019). Participants placed emphasis on having a clear understanding of role, responsibilities, and accountability, and, despite some criticisms of SWE's CPD requirements and governance, the majority considered the protection of the title and the requirement to register as a positive move. There was a desire that this would lead to greater public recognition of social work. The findings also resonate strongly with Cook, Carder and Zschlomler (2022) research, which indicates that "a strong professional identity (PI) sustained experience social workers in practice, contributed to their sense of purpose and meaning and acted as a buffer to the stressors of the role" (p.3). This is an important contribution bearing in mind the ongoing concern about staff retention, well-being, staff morale, and burnout, all of which have been well-documented (Ravalier and Boichat, 2018; UNISON, 2019; BASW,2024; Samuel, 2024; Cook, 2024). Naomi's

account in particular, of her dual identity as a social worker and AMHP and the tight surveillance under which she operates, illustrates Foucault's (1963) theory of the docile body, which is rendered "a pliable object that is subject to power and control", monitored through what Foucault (1979) describes as the *gaze,* drawing on Bentham's (1971) Panopticon. The bureaucratic structures of the state identified by Mills (1959*),* ultimately locate responsibility for risk with the practitioner whilst largely absolving the organisation, a tension that participants described as inseparable from contemporary professional identity.

Having established professionalism as a focal point for participants' views on CPD, the next chapter will explore the facilitators and enablers identified around accessing CPD.

Chapter Seven: Facilitators and Enablers to CPD

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will commence with restating the social worker responsibility, followed by a brief overview of the role and obligations of organisations towards providing CPD for social workers. It will then move on to consider the various themes that have arisen in the analysis of the data that are facilitators and enablers to social workers engaging with CPD. The themes will be explored and illustrated by extracting fragments of data (Bryman,1998) from participants' narratives relating to a particular theme.

7.2 Theme: Motivation

Motivation was a key theme highlighted by research participants, one of the major motivators for undertaking CPD, and voiced, either implicitly, or explicitly, in all participants' narratives (n=21) and was mentioned as a requirement to annually re-register with Social Work England (SWE) in order to continue to practise as a social worker. Importantly, alongside this is a current regulatory requirement for registrants to evidence that they have undertaken and submitted two pieces of CPD that meet the criteria of the Professional Standards (2019), as well as have paid their annual fees. The background to underpinning legislative framework that brought in the regulatory requirement, compliance required by registrants, and duties of employers is covered in depth in Chapter 2. Additionally, there is a process of auditing a percentage of the examples submitted by registrants, which can lead to rejection and in some cases deregistration. Social Work England data indicated that in 2023, 2,256 (2.2%) of registrants were removed from the register, with a slight drop to 2,198 (2.1%) in November 2024 (SWE,2024).

What then motivates social work participants to go over and beyond this? The analysis of the data revealed that participants had a range of additional motivations for undertaking CPD, these falling into several categories. Data indicated that the prime motivation mentioned by over half of the participants (n=11) (52%) was a ensure their practice was current. This was articulated as a desire to build and extend their knowledge base, skills, refresh their legal knowledge, update statutory policies/protocols, as well as competence in practice models that were being

introduced in their specific service user areas. This would give them competence to meet the contemporary societal changes and challenges they faced. Overall, the data revealed participants taking ownership for their own development, evidencing that participants were self-motivated to seek out, and access courses and resources, across a wide spectrum. The extent of these sources/resources will be discussed in greater detail below. CPD could be formal or informal and lead to gaining accredited qualifications to be qualified to undertake the statutory duties required by local authorities. For instance, the role as Best Interest Assessor, Mental Capacity Assessor (MCA, 2005), or Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP), (MHA, 2007). These specific roles require accreditation and evidence of competence in these fields. Other roles, such as the shift to being a qualified Practice Educator, or undertaking a supervisory role, could be aspirational and linked to their personal self-development and part of their career plan. This could lead to advancement, such as career promotion. All these functions are in the realm of demonstrating professionalism in practice as a social worker.

A distinct finding was that nearly half of the participants (n=10) (48%) explicitly highlighted a personal aspiration that they saw CPD as contributing to their personal desire to be the best social worker they could, thus ensuring service users were supported, needs were met and that they delivered competent effective interventions. Other participants were less overt in conveying this view but evidence from the data reveals that their engagement in CPD and their voiced accounts of various actions and commitment to CPD would indicate that this was an underlying aspiration. Halton, Powell, and Scanlon (2015) also found in their research that most participants interviewed in both interviews and focus groups also highlighted that one of their motivations for undertaking CPD was to be “better at my job ultimately” and be “as good as you can be to become “a better social worker” (p.57). These were the same ambitions as participants in my research. A study undertaken by YouGov (2021) for Social Work England indicated that 51% of participants interviewed stated that a motivator for undertaking CPD was a desire to “be the best they can for people they support and gaining new ideas” (p.19).

Jessi, an independent social worker, explained her personal motivation also focused on her engagement with service users. She commented that her learning provided her with relevant information about a diverse range of interventions and how they

could be integrated into practice. Additionally, she could transfer this knowledge to service users, as well as colleagues, illustrating this by her narrative:

> I have a lot of research to do because the spectrum I'm looking at is so wide. So, there's obviously a personal motivation, as well as gaining understanding when I read a book or something similar. I'm working with a couple at the moment, and I actually said to them "Look, I've just read this, it's good." So, the purpose of it is to give me information but also so that I can sign-post people to different resources, your clients, as well as colleagues.

Jessi's reflections also encapsulate the core values and ethics of social work, that include promotion of human rights and social justice (PCF, 2018, Domain 2, ;SWE,2019), as well as a core principle, espoused by Biestek (1961), that of assisting service users (clients) towards self-determination and empowering them to take control of their own lives and decision-making. Jessi's narrative also demonstrates that she is using her CPD knowledge, values and ethics and integrating them into her everyday practice.

A further finding was that participants were motivated by opportunities to attain accredited qualifications enabling them to perform specific prescribed roles, or to progress along a distinct career path. For instance, participant Adam recounted that he had undertaken a lot of training whilst on the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), as well as mandatory/statutory refresher courses, and had now reached the position of Assistant Team Manager. However, he commented he felt "stuck" in his role and limited by what was on offer in his organisation to enhance his practice. He remarked that he vigilantly pursued options for personal advancement with his organisation, emphasising his approach in the following scenario:

> I wanted to expand and be able to offer more. I was taking stock and realised that once you've done this, and that, there really isn't much on offer to go from here. I got to the point when I was disillusioned, and I was really looking for something else to take my social work career to the next level. After a lot of kind of bickering, badgering, and pestering, there are all kinds of words you could use, I was able to persuade the Local Authority to pay for a day a week for me to undertake a post-graduate certificate in Systemic Family Therapy. I know this is a big demand on the budget, but the opportunity has really changed the way I am now viewing social work. I am able to translate my learning into my role now as Team Manager with team members who I supervise and develop. I think it is really important to take personal responsibility for your CPD.

Interpreting this finding, it demonstrates that CPD is not only a vehicle for increasing competence but also one where practitioners construct and progress

their professional identities. Also, in Adam's case how his advanced learning can be transmitted and cascaded down to his colleagues through the supervisory and team functions, that aligns with findings of Halton, Powell and Scanlon (2015) on career-stage motivation in the caring professions and that practitioners' learning needs evolve as they progress and that and they require specialist and advanced opportunities that are critical for organisations if they wish to retain their staff.

A finding across the data was participants were self-motivated in seeking out a range of opportunities and linking them to successfully undertaking CPD. For instance, Zara, observed that there were opportunities available, but it required practitioners to take initiative, asserting:

> There are opportunities on offer, but you need to be self-motivated, and initiative take the to take these up. We also have access to some external training online, such as Making Research Count (Kings and Bedford Colleges). This is where I have learnt a lot and it has influenced me and made me more reflective about my practice.

Whereas Cassie similarly in her narrative drew on the different strands of CPD and how they met several requirements, especially compliance with SWE regulations, remarking:

> We get regular emails about what is on offer in our Local Authority, although at the start of Covid there was not much on offer until they (LA) learnt how to put it online. For me personally I think that the majority of it is probably self-initiated. You see a topic and think I would like to do that as it is interesting; I put myself forward and I make the time to do it. But there is also the part where I am aware and know I need to be uploading it onto my Social Work England account. So, there is an element of it being a necessity and more so than under the previous regulator.

Another participant Lara, also commented that her organisation provided a good range of training opportunities but ultimately it was up to the individual to organise themselves and prioritise their workload to attend, commenting:

> …Well, I think it's promoted well within my local authority. We have a lot of training opportunities available, so I think it's up to the individual to make the time in their diary to attend the training… So, I think either you're interested in learning or you're not. I think it does depend on a level of self-motivation in terms of how much you want to prioritise it and your working week.

Tom provides an illustrative reflection on his motivation for undertaking CPD pointing out concern about the role of external and environmental that affect motivation. He distinguishes between intrinsic motivation to learn against external pressures,

specifically highlighting lack of stimulus from interacting with colleagues since CPD post-pandemic had shifted to on-line, rather than face-to-face, sharing his perspective:

> There are two perspectives for me. The first one is the motivation and then the second is the challenges to your personal life. So, if you are not interacting with others, it's always difficult to remain motivated. When you walk into a training course there are interactions with others, even informal discussions start before the actual training. You can build those relationships and that will drive and increase motivation. So, if there is not face to face training and it is being delivered by Zoom in the comfort of your own home, you could be sitting on a sofa instead of a hard chair and there is a tendency to fall asleep. And if you've got you know the cat, the dog or the kids distracting you that is also a problem and that can lead to lack of motivation. If I am doing this at home, I think I can catch up with this training later especially if I am multitasking in my head. It all effects that motivation, so that is the problem…and the time to develop the IT skills also affects engagement and managing the session.

Tom's observations extended to several participants who commented on the shift to on-line delivery of CPD during Covid 19 pandemic, and continuance afterwards and its effect on motivation and its sustainability.

Interpreting the pattern of data through Foucault's (1978) concept of governmentality and its subsequent extension by Brown (2015), who observes in the following phrase "neoliberalism shifts the regulatory competence of the state onto 'responsible' individuals" (p.43). This results in self-responsibility shifting to the individual social worker to manage alongside their other tasks, being structurally produced subjectivity in which self-management of learning becomes inescapable.

7.3 Theme: Keeping up to Date and Self-Development

Overall, the findings from majority of participants' narratives (n=19) (90%) indicated that they were committed to enhancing their learning and building on their practice. This, they did, by upskilling their knowledge and practice skills and requirements to become more versed about complex contemporary issues with which they were faced in whatever service user group they practised. Additionally, there was a commitment to how they could integrate new knowledge and methods effectively into their practice to address the multi-faceted issues service users encountered through societal structural and political decisions. This suggests that the majority have taken what O'Malley (2009) describes as the neoliberal political discourse of responsibilisation. For the majority of participants there was a general recognition that initial social work education and training was the starting point, and that there

was a continuous need to refresh and build on practice knowledge and skills. There was a recognition that the landscape of social work and practice issues had changed, with an increase in underpinning legislation, applicable to both children and family and adult services. Issues, such as domestic abuse, child safeguarding, child exploitation, gang culture, drug misuse, adult safeguarding, modern slavery, hording, and migratory issues affected by international crises required learning and development opportunities across a wide spectrum to facilitate effective interventions. Participants saw CPD as an opportunity to attain these attributed and to provide a range of interventions to service users – all of which link to having a 'sociological imagination' (Mills, 1959) to seek solutions to private troubles that have manifested themselves as public issues.

Sara's reflections highlighted a range of areas that contributed to her motivation to undertake CPD, including upskilling her knowledge and skills across the wide spectrum of practice areas, illustrating her views as follows:

> CPD is about ensuring I'm up to date with law, policy, social issues, and research as this ensures that my skills are relevant, and they support and continue to be enhanced throughout my career… it means taking time out from my day-to-day practice to take up opportunities to learn and reflect, which I think is really important, as it helps develop my skills.

Importantly, in Sara's narrative her aspirations correlate with other participants' views within this research, referenced above, those surveyed on behalf of Social Work England (2020) and highlighted by Halton, Powell, and Scanlan (2015) as a motivation for undertaking CPD.

Vera highlighted several different strands, such as self-development and career progression by having the up-to-date knowledge and skills. Her aim was to effectively practice with a particular service user group by ensuring an awareness of relevant changes, explaining this in her narrative below:

> Undertaking CPD helps you to grow and develop as a practitioner…when I was newly qualified having the extra support in place was important, it was PQ (Consolidation) Awards then. Now I am doing a Practice Educator's Programme, so the educational development helps you to build on your knowledge and skills of a particular service-user group and also progress or to move onto a senior level. But it is also making sure that you've got up to date knowledge, specially making sure you go on the legal changes' refresher

courses, which are really good and keep us up to scratch with all the changes going on.

The points made by Sara and Vera were familiar themes emphasised by almost half of the participants (n=10) (48%). Whereas Melissa's motivation was also a combination of upskilling and being competent in her role as a social worker, using opportunities for self-development which were important to her and putting the knowledge she had assimilated into practice. Melissa conveyed her views as follows:

> As a practitioner I would always try to develop myself, as well as my social work role but also my skills. Like everyone in the council who is a social worker there is a requirement to go on different training courses that are mandatory, especially policies or protocols. But you can also go on other courses, like Best Interest Assessor (BIA) or Mental Capacity Act (MCA), as well as attendance at university to undertake the Practice Educator's Programme, (PEP) that I have been on, and am now putting into practice what I have learnt there.

Another participant Dave, whose role was as a social work Practice Educator, supervisor, and tutor, saw continuously upskilling across the spectrum of social work as a key motivator for undertaking CPD, as well as demonstrating professional competence, and being able to impart this in his various roles, expressing his views as follows:

> I keep up with research, plus on-going learning to increase my knowledge base and skills. It's especially important as I supervise students and other people, so it's acting like a role model. I suppose if you yourself are willing to do CPD as an individual and constantly update your knowledge and skills, you are more likely to be able to persuade others of the importance that they should update their knowledge, etc., especially colleagues, or students… It is important that we have the same body of knowledge as other professionals with whom we work.

An Assistant Team Manager Elsie reflecting on CPD she had undertaken, commented:

> As my career has progressed, I've done bits and pieces of training, some of them I am not sure that they have been particularly helpful, but others have been really helpful, and I would classify them as CPD. So, I guess it works and fits differently for each individual and is it good enough?

Elsie went on to say that for her it was important to continue to upskill and consolidate her knowledge and skills she found that by having students was a positive, valuable experience, illustrating her views in the following narrative:

> For me, CPD is about also continuing to develop new skills and knowledge. I think taking on a student is an excellent way for social workers to be able to do

> that because it kind of helps them learn and develop and helps us to reflect on ourselves and practice.

Here Elsie draws on the importance of critical reflection in her practice, which was also highlighted intermittently by participants in the study. Domain 6 in the PCF for social workers is core to social work practice. There is a requirement that social workers develop the ability to critically evaluate their practice, analyse information and apply to their professional judgement and decision-making. The skill is also a central tenet to the provision of quality supervision that offers opportunities to explore self-awareness, professional curiosity, and creativity (Thompson and Pascal, 2012).

A similar view was highlighted by Derek, who spoke about the importance of keeping up to date with contemporary issues. He, too, commented that one of the ways he had done this was to undertake the PEPs programme and work with students, conveying this in the following illustration:

> One way that really is keeping me on my toes, yes, forcing me whether I like it or not is by having students. It keeps my knowledge and skills refreshed and up to date, enhances my learning and actually motivates me and keeps me connected to that process of learning…recent example would be with my student thinking and engaging with the Black Lives Matter Movement and us thinking about unconscious bias and critical race theory, which I previously did at university on my course.

Derek highlights here keeping up to date with contemporary issues and integrating this into his practice, as well as cascading information to his student and exploring important anti-discriminatory practice (Tedam and Cane, 2022).

Four other participants, Elsa, Milli, Jessi and Rob (19%) when focusing on the importance of developing knowledge and skills across practice areas that increased their professional development, specifically mentioned these also contributed to them being in a position to share these with service uses or other professional colleagues. From Elsa's perspective she commented:

> It is important to remain up to date in your practice especially with your knowledge and skill set, whether that's research, or developing different areas of your practice, from writing case notes to assessments, doing direct work or learning different areas to work on a specific case…it is kind of having opportunities to just generally learn and develop your practice.

Milli and Rob, both commented on the importance of keeping their practice knowledge and skills up to date, recognising the changing landscape of social work and contemporary society, as well as the importance of being in tune with their service users' group and professional colleagues. Milli emphasised her views as follows:

> Training, I think, is vital. You have to have it because actually you're always going to learn new things in whatever career you are in as there are always new things coming out. You must be up to date because otherwise you're going to be working in a way that doesn't kind of reflect well on, for example young people with whom you are working, whose lives have changed, and you have to be able to understand those changes.

Whereas Rob's views on CPD had a similar focus, he highlighted the importance of practice ethics and values (PCF, 2018, Domain 2) as well as clarity and focus when working with other professionals whose remit differed, pointing out:

> I do CPD as to me it is important to continue to update my knowledge, skills, and research, as there are new initiatives and knowledge that social workers need to acquire. It is essential to have clear knowledge of practice, ethics, and values. This is especially important if you are working in a multi-disciplinary team where there are differences between our approach as a social worker, using the social model (Wolfensberger, 1983) and medical model (Laing, 1971) used by some colleagues.

Tom highlighted that there were several positive strands undertaking CPD, for example gaining competence in practice, as well as advancing his career commenting:

> …CPD personally helps me to develop myself professional, but also increases my knowledge base and to access developmental opportunities…there is a requirement by SWE, as well as previous regulators to keep up to date with our knowledge and skills to practice…I have gained from CPD as it has helped me move through my career in terms of my jobs and also helped me manage complex challenges and cases. So, for me the ethos is, if I really want to advance in my social work career I will have to continue to develop myself and do CPD.

Tom articulates a focused rationale for undertaking CPD, especially compliance, evidencing another example of a participant who has integrated the "neoliberal political discourse" of responsibilisation described by O'Malley (2009).

Interpreting the findings of this theme together, the overarching data from the participants is that there is a recognition that the initial qualification is the start of

the journey in social work, rather than the destination of professional learning. The contemporary social work landscape, with its widening legislative base, and increasingly complex interface between private troubles and public issues (Mills, 1959), demand continuous refreshing of knowledge and skills. Participants consistently located CPD as the mechanism through which they could access new learning around the complexity of practice issues, particularly the lived experiences of service users underpinned by their commitment to ethics and values (PCF 2018.Domain 2) and critical reflection (Askeland and Fook, 2009; Thompson and Pascal, 2012; PCF, 2018 Domain 2; SWE Professional Standards, 4.6). There has been a recurring importance on personal responsibility and on being proactive, highlighting how the responsibilisation discourse of advanced liberal governance (Rose, 1996a cited in Peeters, 2019; O'Malley, 2009) has shaped and influenced the way participants describe their professional development.

7.4 Organisational Context

It is incumbent, and a requirement for organisations, whether they are statutory, voluntary, or private working in Social Work and Social Care to provide ongoing CPD opportunities for their staff whether they are qualified social workers, ancillary, or social care staff. The Standards for Employers of Social Workers in England (Refreshed, 2020) are set out, and endorsed, by various organisations associated with social work and social care, for instance, Skills for Care, Local Government Organisations, Department of Education; Department of Health and Social Care; Social Work England; UNISON; BASW; as well as voluntary and private organisations. There is an overarching CPD Strategy, which has six core principles, a CPD framework, Employer's Guide, Manager's Guide and Social Worker's Guide which sets out the framework and expectations. When originally instituted in the UK four regulators were set up, England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland all signing up to the codes of practice for social care workers and employers (Office for Public Management, 2000, GSCC,2002). However, later England abandoned this agreement whilst other UK countries retained this obligation (Jones, D., 2020, cited in Bamford and Bilton,2020). There is, however, flexibility on how employers meet their obligations to the provision of CPD. The documentation (e.g., The Standards for Employers of Social Workers in England, 2020) recommends that employers who

provide services in the social care section should see CPD as an entitlement for staff in their organisations (Standard 6). They are expected to confirm that they have a strategy in place to provide ongoing training, learning, and development for the workforce to ensure development of skills that underpin their work. This strategy would include individual supervision being in place to provide staff with an opportunity to critically reflect on their practice, as improves competence, upskilling of the workforce and evaluation of practice. Good quality provision and support are seen as factors that encourage staff retention, which has been a long-term problem, especially in children's service. Research from several surveys indicates that social workers are leaving the profession due to high, challenging caseloads, as well as due to austerity, effects of Covid 19 pandemic and long-term wage restraint (Ravalier, Wainwright, Clabburn, Loon and Symth, 2021; UNISON, 2022; Samuel, 2022; Samuel, 2023; SWE, 2023).

The provision of how CPD is delivered and accessed will be set out in two separate sections. The first section will concentrate on CPD opportunities provided by employers/organisations and participants perspective of these. The second section will move on to exploring the data from participants about the types of CPD they undertook to develop their practice and meet their regulatory requirements and their personal development needs. Analysing the data proved very enlightening with it revealing a comprehensive, creative picture of how CPD had moved on in recent years. It revealed that participants had sought out a diverse range of resources to meet their individual needs and learning styles, as well as meet the changes and challenges inherent in practice especially the complexities associated with modern living, such as safeguarding, domestic abuse, coercive control, drug and alcohol misuse, mental health issues, modern slavery, trafficking, and exploitation.

7.4.1 Theme: What CPD Opportunities do Organisations Offer?

Employers of social workers are required to provide induction and continuing professional development (CPD) for staff, although there is no prescribed level of provision and flexibility is permitted. Table One (Appendix 16, p.353) provides data collected from participants, who worked across different organisations which were primarily statutory, of the types of CPD opportunities available. Drawing on the findings and the related literature into the discussion this section examines in turn the extent and modes of organisational provision, the disruption and recovery experience

during the COVID-19 pandemic; the surveillance and compliance regime governing course attendance; the gaps in advanced and specialist learning identified by the cohort; the influence of managerialism and austerity upon organisational CPD provision and implementation of models of practice, as well as external learning opportunities.

The first finding is that most participants (n=19) (90%) considered their organisations offered a good range of traditional in-service training provision, which included induction, the updating of legislative framework, organisational practice models, and routine briefings on policies and practice issues. Generally, organisations used in-house trainers, some of whom had completed a 'training the trainers' programme, with a minority of organisations commissioning specialist/expert trainers to provide specific/specialist courses. Attendance at external conferences, seminars, presentations, and workshops, as well as university courses, now played a minority role in CPD delivery. Despite this position, around a third of participants (n=7) (33%) indicated that they were confident that if they could make out a good case to attend an external course their manager/supervisor would support funding for this, with a caveat that it was not an exorbitant cost. The exception was attendance at specific training programmes linked to providing a statutory duty role within the organisation, for example as Best Interest Assessor (BIA), Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP), or Practice Educator Programme (PEP). Findings indicated that a small number of participants, (n=3) (14%) in Children's Services across the statutory organisations had recently attended a course commissioned by DfE in conjunction with Research in Practice (RiP), Tavistock Portman NHS Foundation and Goldsmiths and Sussex Universities on a Practice Supervisors Development Programme (PSDP). Authorities were asked to nominate practitioners and allocated a specific number of places on a residential course. However, due to Covid 19 Pandemic that occurred during the course, the course had moved to being run on-line.

As indicated in the above section overall the majority of participants considered that their organisation provided a good range of basic training opportunities. Derek commented:

> In a way, from when I first started, I think CPD happens quite naturally within X. If you're working for a local authority there's no shortage of training opportunities

> as they are coming along all the time, but really you haven't got time to undertake all the possibilities on offer.

Participant Elsa, from a different organisation, spoke positively about the breadth of opportunities in her organisation and her approach to CPD recounting:

> I think I've got quite a lot of choice in my organisation. There was systemic practice course on offer as the agency model, which was good as I was genuinely interested in it... So, yes, I have had quite a lot of opportunities and things I wanted to do. I think it is because I'm also probably somebody that just kind of takes ownership of that side and I haven't needed a lot of guidance from managers.

This second finding is best interpreted as evidence that statutory organisations have, overall, met the procedural requirement to provide induction and ongoing development but have done so primarily through a model of in-house, generalist provision.

A significant finding from the majority of participants (n=18) (86%) indicated that during the initial stages of Covid 19 pandemic (March 2020) formal, organised, CPD, generally came to a halt, although there were still opportunities for self-development via their organisation's intranet for e-learning and webinars. Data from participants reported that it took most organisations some time (around six months) for them to develop the expert technological skills to facilitate a variety of in-house professional development courses on-line. Alongside this it required social work participants to gain the technological skills to participate. Research findings indicate that in the interim period many participants used their own initiative by trawling a wide spectrum of internet sources to continue with CPD. Table 2 (Appendix 17, p.354) illustrates that they were able to draw on an extensive range of resources providing a range of knowledge, skills, and support in order to meet their individual and practice-based learning needs.

Participants reported that online delivery has, in significant respects persisted post-pandemic. Over half of the cohort (n=12) (57%) reported that face-to-face constraints of the pandemic period, coupled with sustained long working, had produced a sense of isolation and loneliness, particularly felt at times when they had pressing casework issues.

Sara reflecting on CPD commented that, in the past, training "was seen as a bit of a luxury." She contrasted the situation as it was then to the current provision, where

there is a requirement to undertake CPD to remain registered as a social worker but despite this study time was not protected and had to be interwoven into assigned work, commenting:

> You could step away from the office, but now that we are doing things on-line actually it feels that there is a whole day. Besides the course you have still got your emails pinging through, and you've still got the phone ringing/buzzing and it's very difficult to set a whole day aside for training. There is an expectation you will work around it…

This finding may be interpreted as indicating that, while online delivery has expanded access to training and broadened the range of resources available to practitioners, it has also eroded the boundaries that previously separated learning from the work context, as well as professional boundaries between home and work.

A third finding found that training sessions offered by organisations generally comprised of half, one or two-day courses on specific topics. Additionally, there was provision for induction programmes, as well as updates on the statutory/mandatory requirements of the organisation that were available on a rolling basis. The majority of these latter induction courses were provided on-line, rather than face-to-face (F2F). Half the participants (n=10) (47%) indicated that they were closely monitored through strict surveillance as to their attendance at their attendance at updating their statutory course. With (n=11) (53%) indicating they would receive multiple e-mails from training officers in advance to ensure compliance with organisational requirements. As previously indicated some participants described tensions arising within their organisation where casework crises had necessitated last-minute non-attendance.

Interpretating the participants' data they link closely to Foucault's (1977) theme on surveillance and discipline whereas, part of the shift to managerialism that is closely operated by the neo-liberal states, has led to increased scrutiny and surveillance of social work practice. As previously discussed in the theoretical framework where the quote by Andersson (2008) aptly illuminates this as a "state of surveillance, which is an exercise of power" (p.127). Furthermore, he depicts current working environments as similar to those of Bentham's Panopticon (1791) where potential or actual surveillance is geared towards generating compliance, or in Foucault's terms, docility. The monitoring of attendance ought not to be read as a discrete organisation anomaly. A recent Community Care survey (Samuel, 2025) reported that one local

authority had recorded same-day cancellation rates of approximately 26% by social workers, with similar patterns in other authorities. The article reported that several authorities had introduced cancellation fees against relevant team budgets, one of which reported that the measure had reduced non-attendance by around 50%. According to the article the intent was not to assign individual blame but encourage managerial reflection on cancellation decisions and to ensure operational backup.

Data from nearly half (n=9) (43%) of the participants, particularly highlighted by more experienced social workers, reported that there is a noticeable absence of professional learning around specific specialist areas of practice, for example autism, trauma-informed practice, transgender issues, working with older service users with multiple health needs, personality disorders and management training. There was criticism of the repetitive nature of statutory and mandatory courses, which were reported to be pitched at early-career practitioners and lack of opportunity for more advanced learning. However, despite these critiques around half of the participants (n=10) (48%) did not consider attendance at such courses to be a waste of time but used them as refreshers and bringing to the fore previously acquired knowledge. A recurrent criticism was that internal in-house courses lack specialist expertise to advance the knowledge base of more experienced practitioners.

Vera's reflections highlight the divergence between provision for early-career and experienced staff, with her account stating:

> …I've noticed an improvement in terms of what opportunities are available over the past few years…it seems though to be primarily to be a lot of promoting development early on in social workers' careers to get them more upskilled, which I think is great and that's a positive thing. However, I think for staff who've been around for longer there is not so much apart from standard stuff, e.g., mandatory/statutory updates, law updates.

Lucy made a similar point regarding safeguarding training, having raised the issue formally with her organisation:

> I have raised in my organisation that there is a lack of advanced safeguarding training or refresher training for other areas as all they have is the universal child protection, which I did years ago. It was all very universal, and the pitch was wrong for an experienced practitioner. I fed-back that they should be offering something more but that has not come out. There tends to be a lot of mandatory training as a new starter but once you have done that it tends to be like you need specialist development for teams to get to a higher level of competence.

Stewart gave a similar view, noting that experienced practitioners were required to look beyond their employer:

> …I think that in terms of formal learning for more experienced workers they (courses) seem to decrease, and you've got to look further afield for relevant ones. There are an awful lot of safeguarding courses you know for very newly qualified social workers, but less courses as you become more experienced. They sort of diminish so you've got to be more inventive, but I am a firm believer in that.

Adam's view and experience was comparable to that of Stewart, specifically regarding the absence of post-qualification advancement opportunities:

> In terms of early days in social worker, I think that what is offered to ASYEs is good training, as it adds on to what your social work training, but there is a budget allocated for that…From what I can see probably two / three years after qualification there is no advancement for career development and that is when I got really defeatist as there were no options…It was then I managed to get the Local Authority to support my family therapy course, which was a really personal journey for me, but also has benefited the organisation. For more experienced workers there are no advanced level training, which is a gap.

Interpretating the data finds they indicate that a common feature of in-service is that the current model prioritises early-career consolidation at the expense of advanced, specialist and reflective learning that were perceived by participants to lack subject expertise and inhibit the development of experienced practitioners. The pattern resonates with Freie's (1970) critique of "banking" model of education, in which knowledge is "deposited" within a passive recipient unilaterally by instructor. Whereas Freire's argument is that learners' experiences should be valued and the curriculum should be designed so that their views and perspectives are included, as well as they are given space to reflect on their learning, which would incorporate the needs of advanced CPD learners.

The data findings indicate CPD has been shaped by both managerialism and long-term effects of austerity, first introduced post-financial crisis in 2008, and these have played a significant part in confining CPD opportunities for participants and resulted in largely in-service provision. Derek's account particularly illustrated the influence that managerial changes may exert upon the continuity of practice models within an organisation, commenting:

> Training opportunities though are highly influenced by management and their structures, particularly changes in personnel. At one time in X organisation all

> social workers were being trained in systemic practice, which, in my view, had been embedded into the culture of the organisation. However, with a change of personnel this fell out of favour and something else became the organisation model, i.e., Signs of Safety (SoS).

Derek's narrative resonates with Mills' (1959) critique of bureaucracy, in which decision-making is concentrated within management and exercised in a "top-down" manner with little consultation of practitioners about issues of practice. However, this contrasts with Sara's viewpoint who experienced a more participatory approach in her authority, where practitioner representatives had the opportunity to meet with the director of children's services to identify gaps in provision. However, despite these identified gaps in provision of services they did not always translate into training being commissioned or services/resources put in place. Her overview is illustrated in the following narrative:

> I think our development team has been proactive and in the last year or two making sure there are lots of different things on offer that are relevant, and they have picked up on things that practitioners are raising. We have a representative at the Service Level Forum to raise issues. We spoke about the gaps in training and resources, and I raised contextual safeguarding training, but despite this we have not had specific training, and we are dealing with really high-risk cases, so that is a gap.

Reflecting further Sara observed a shift in the status of training, recounting that in the past it has been "seen as a bit of a luxury," whereas currently with the requirements of the regulatory framework that required CPD for registration this was no longer the case. However, despite these changes there was no study time allocated, or protective workload within the organisation and CPD had to be interwoven alongside day-to-day practice requirements and post-pandemic less learning-work boundaries that have been previously highlighted.

These accounts are supported by the research of Rogowski (2020), concerning the effects of austerity measures imposed in UK in 2010 on service users which led to significant reductions in funding from central government to local authorities (Revenue Support Grant). This has had a knock-on effect concerning CPD opportunities for social workers, as well as provision of resources for service users (Lavalette, 2019b). However, in 2017 the government introduced an apprenticeship levy on larger organisations (DfE, 2017). During the course of my research, as well as during my own role as a tutor on pre and post qualifying social work courses, I became aware of a number of authorities have been using this route of funding to

meet the training needs of full-time employed staff currently in roles such as assistant social workers, or support workers, to put them through qualifying social work programmes. This is similar to the previous secondment programmes and in the realm of “grow your own” staff primarily to encourage retention. However, this has not led to it extending to higher grade qualifications, such as management mentioned by Lucy, who considered she required advanced training to facilitate and effectively undertake her role, as well as personal growth at a higher level rather than the basic course on offer.

> If you had asked me that question two years ago, I would have said no, there were not a lot of opportunities. Whereas our organisation has worked really hard at providing more opportunities and it is much better than it was.

Nevertheless, adding to this she still felt more advanced provision is not on the agenda for more experienced workers commenting:

> I had supervision a couple of weeks ago and I said to my manager, “What can I do?” The offer was an apprenticeship management course…it is great, it gives me something extra, but I do not see it as a progression. It is a level 3 apprenticeship I am being offered, whereas I should be looking at master’s level. It is that kind of thing what is lacking in career development in the local authority organisations and that is what I am struggling with…

Collectively these findings can be interpreted as evidence that the structure of CPD opportunities within statutory organisations is determined by managerial decision-making, influenced by austerity and fiscal constraints, rather than practitioners’ development needs or career planning.

Discussing her organisations CPD opportunities, Melissa was positive about the opportunity to develop expertise in different models, such as Strengths (Saleebey,1992), and Three Conversations Approaches (Fawcett, Johnson, Mould, and Ubhi, 2021), not only through Face-to-Face (F2F) teaching but via Zoom and access to modules on the intranet. Melissa emphasised that this gave her a reference point to learn more about different elements and have access to an eclectic approach to use in her practice. She commented:

> Our organisation restructured, but we did have a number of what they called ‘consultation meetings.’ We discussed the way that our work was going to change. We had some training on how we would receive phone calls, advise people and which model we would choose to undertake first, but we also had the modules on the intranet as refreshers…I think every model has its strengths, but you can’t always apply the model. I don’t blindly follow one model. I prefer to have a more eclectic approach where you look at different models and apply

> them to the circumstances. I am a structured person, so I like having models in place as guides for my work. These are useful if we are being challenged on how we work and its impartiality.

The findings indicated that nearly two-thirds of participants' organisations (n=15) (71%) had implemented a preferred model of practice, using this to underpin their day-to-day practice. In Children and Families nine (n=9) (43%) used Signs of Safety, one systemic practice (5%) and one Strengths' Approach (5%). One organisation also used Restorative Justice alongside Signs of Safety. In Adult Services nearly half (n=4) (19%) of the adult practitioner cohort's organisations had shifted to a practice models, using a combination of Strengths' Approach and Three Conversations. All staff members working in the nominated service user group were trained to use the model, with additional training for supervisory and management staff to enable them to run strategy and decision-making meetings. Implementing these models of practice required a large financial investment, which was allocated from the organisation's training budget. Generally, participants' narratives were positive about this shift in practice, with a high proportion of participants commenting positively about the opportunity for inbuilt peer supervision and case discussions, valuing the time to share practice, anxieties and concerns about cases and learn through this process, as well as gain from the opportunity of cross-fertilisation of ideas from more experienced practitioners.

One participant Adam was very positive that he had had been financially supported to undertake Family Therapy training but critical that his organisation had missed out some crucial training building blocks that would have maximised Signs of Safety effectiveness, commenting:

> As an authority we have signed up hook, line and sinker and everything else to Signs of Safety (SoS) approach (Turnell and Edwards, 1999), which has at its heart a solution focused approach. But having done my course (Family Therapy) one of those modules was about Solution Focused Practice. And yes, it really helped me to connect the dots between the origins of SoS, which was founded within a Solution Focused Model, and kind of how we use it in practice. However, I think that's the gap that we've had in the Council. They have spent a lot of money to do the training to change our forms and our whole service structure Council wide within children services like from our Front Door, which is called our MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub), but missed out on a crucial piece of training – solution focused approach – an essential building block of the model (SoS).

The findings indicate the shift to standardisation of practice through the implementation of designated models has enabled organisations to provide a coherent training infrastructure, such as peer-support, supervisory roles, which has generally been welcomed by the majority of practitioners. However, the shift to standardised delivery of models that link to Foucault's (1978/2012, p.136) concept of the institutional production of "docile bodies," that may be "manipulated, shaped and trained" to submit obedient and compliant practitioners to undertake assigned tasks, thus normalising being subjected to surveillance.

Finally, on this section, one participant, Lucy, an assistant manager, who worked with care leavers up to the age of twenty-five, enthusiastically gave an example of transformative shift in her practice. She had been given an opportunity to undertake an external one-week residential programme run by an international trainer, which she describes in her narrative below:

> The training was for five days, and I was one of the five nominated. Although some of the course was quite Americanised there was a structured, quite formal morning and then in the afternoon you applied what you had learnt. It was very intense, no interruptions. It was one of the most inspirational and creative courses I have been on, and I learnt so much about reunification of children and young people who had multiple breakdowns, and how to help stabilise them, as well as renew contact with lost relatives. It really created a shift in my thinking.

It was evident from Lucy's account that she had really valued the time and space to learn, take on new ideas and practise these in a safe environment before modelling them to team members. Her account suggests the opportunity had a transformative effect on her practice and contributing to shifting the organisational culture, as well as taking on board working in a more creative and empowering way with young people and colleagues with whom she worked. This was no easy feat, bearing in mind the ideological position that had been prevalent in the UK care system for many years about restricting contact with children in care with their birth families.

7.5 Theme: CPD – Personal Choice Opportunities

This section explored with participants how they manage and facilitated their CPD opportunities accessed by personal choice, alongside, or additionally to those provided by their organisation. This was not only a response to the Covid 19 Pandemic, but changes in information and technological provision that enabled participants to confidently gain access to an array of resources and knowledge

economy and thus become more independent and autonomous. Findings revealed that participants did not confine themselves to opportunities offered by their employers but demonstrated initiative. The majority of participants, in my opinion, demonstrated resourcefulness, ingenuity, and creativity in their approach to CPD, using their initiative that demonstrated professional curiosity (Burton and Revell, 2018) to their practice. The findings revealed that participants drew from an extensive range of technological options that have sprung up, for example an extensive use of internet search engines and social work websites where material was available on open-access websites. Additionally, there was evidence of access to social science and social policy research sites, utilising these to meet the educational, training and knowledge economy commensurate with the needs of twenty-first century social workers. Burton and Revell (2018) in their article cite Kashdan *et al.,* (2013 p.142) who explains 'curiosity' in terms of an 'exploratory behaviour'. Further, individuals with this trait have "the predisposition to recognise and search for new knowledge," "have higher-order skills, with flexibility and are adaptable to changing situations." The research participants appeared to display these characteristics. Table 2 (Appendix 17, p.354) illustrates the diverse extent and wealth of opportunities discovered, that were used by participants to enhance their CPD opportunities. The next section will draw on findings, illustrated by participants' narratives.

For instance, Debra, who had qualified some years ago but an interrupted pattern of work due to health issues, lacked confidence in her ability and disclosed she found it difficult always to get the advice and support when required. This became even more pronounced during Covid lockdown, with homeworking and its resultant isolation. However, her narrative indicated that by her approach she displayed professional curiosity (Burton and Revell, 2018), by searching the internet to find different resources and support groups to meet her practice needs. One was a support group accessed through a Facebook podcast, hosted by a social work tutor, which she joined. It was evident from Debra's perspective that this had helped reduce her feelings of isolation and gave her a new dimension on the importance of professional identity. Reflecting on her experience of using Facebook podcast as a resource, Debra asserted:

> It is really quite hard to describe how much of an impact it had on me …. but I think it was quite profound. It was nice because people talked a lot about having

> an identity as a professional, which was really helpful. I think it was the right focus for me as I think in the pandemic social workers came to be left behind.

Far from being passive and accepting the normal routes, Debra used the conditions of the pandemic and initiative to seek out new, peer-mediated development openings, which offered her a range of new opportunities that through professional networks that strengthened her professional identity formation (Cook, Carder and Zschomler, 2022). Another important dimension of her account is that it helped reduce her feeling of isolation and loneliness that were prevalent during the pandemic (Manthorpe, *et al.,* 2021; Marshall, *et al.,* 2021; Kingstone, *et al.,* 2022). Her proactiveness increased opportunities for self and professional development.

Derek, as an experienced senior social worker, was positive about the many formal opportunities that were offered by his organisation though there were limitations. Derek spoke of beginning to work with a young service-user but had no direct knowledge of working with a specific diagnosis of Autism. He explained that he wanted to capture the young person's views about his situation and needs, as well as ensure he worked empathetically with his service-user. Derek outlined that he searched the internet and found a service user podcast who spoke about his lived experience, conveying this in the following caption:

> There are CPD formal opportunities but there is also so much on-line. There are podcasts you can listen to on YouTube…I recently found one from this chap with Autism doing presentations on his experiences and understanding of what it is as a person with Autism; it has been very helpful to my practice.

Derek's account illustrates a humanistic, service user centred orientation, seeking out the lived experience of an individual with autism so that his practice was informed by their perspectives and he could weave this into his practice. This connects with Freire's (1970) emphasis on dialogical learning and Witkin's (1998) creative ideas to gain more in-depth understanding of the context of individuals to gain richer understanding of other perspectives. Additionally, it promotes looking at a wider landscape for CPD, and, importantly, bringing service-user voices more accessible to practitioners and recognising areas raised previously of the importance of work-based learning (Ferguson, 2021).

Milli, a deputy manager, spoke of her role as manager in a team of working with a care-leavers between 18 and 25, whose needs were diverse and complex. She commented that whilst she had developed a range of assessment skills in different settings, she had not had experience of assessing foster carers and using Form Fs (Application assessment to become foster carer). She had requested attendance at an external course to develop skills in the assessment process, but this had been denied as she was not a member of the fostering assessment team. Milli asserted that her role was to work alongside foster carers, and she felt it incumbent that was fully appraised of the type of assessments and training they received to be as informed as possible. She sourced a two-day course by a national organisation and took two days' leave and paid for herself to attend. In her narrative she conveyed the following:

> The course I went on Zoom recently to acquire foster assessment skills was excellent. The people were from all over UK and Ireland, and we were able to share experiences and commonalities, as well as differences and built-up rapport…There are limitations from lack of social interaction, but I didn't feel it there…although you do miss networking and getting ideas from others in different organisations…

Tom a participant in adult services advised that when he joined his organisation he was provided with a number of courses, such as Best Interest Assessor qualification. However, he felt that he lacked expertise in risk assessment and management, but his organisation would not support him financially to attend a specialist programme. He reports that, in his view, he needed this expertism to feel confident about his practice. On his own initiative he sourced and paid for relevant course, which he saw as key to his career advancement, commenting:

> …If I had not had that training in the past, it would have been difficult for me when I joined the organisation to "hit the ground running" and draw on expertise in my current role as a front-line manager in a team that triages incoming referrals. I feel I am able to make decisions around risk due to the post-graduate training I had with X University in risk assessment and management. When this job opportunity came up, in the interview I was able to demonstrate my confidence, especially the right knowledge and skills that I got from that course, and these were very key to my current role.

Interpreting these findings, the participants' willingness revealed the depth of their commitment to professional development that they had funded their own training as they were keen to develop knowledge about a particular area of practice and had

integrated this into their practice. Other studies have identified lack of funding has been a barrier to CPD development (e.g., Halton, Powell & Scanlon, 2015) and the expectation that practitioners might fund their own CPD development has equity implications and clearly disadvantages practitioners who are not in position to fund their CPD. However, in Tom's case the postgraduate qualification was instrumental to securing his current managerial role and Milli's commitment to understanding the complete context of the assessment process put her in a better position to lead more effectively. The data, therefore, shows that practice and career development is exposed to structural inequalities.

Overall, Table 2 (Appendix 17, p.354) indicates participants did not have a single preferential approach to CPD. It revealed that participants selected from a diverse, wide range of learning opportunities. Their interpretation of what was CPD drew on what would be generally seen as traditional methods, for example lectures, workshops, work-based learning to using a range of contemporary technological aids, such as blended or hybrid learning, which increased the diversity of opportunities. Various Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) (Laming, 2003,2009; Lock, 2013; Lundberg, 2013) and Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) (Braye, *et al*., 2014) recognised the importance of the need for professional curiosity in practice (Burton and Revell, 2018). Over many years reports/enquiries concerning the tragic deaths of children and adults, criticism has been levelled at social workers, across both sectors, for one of the practice failures, such as failure to apply professional curiosity in their practice (Laming, 2003; Munro, 2011; Lock, 2013, Frost, 2013). Warner (2014) cites the vilification of social workers as the "destructive, politically motivated nature of the relationship between the social work profession and the media (p.1510, cited in Burton and Revell, 2018). Authors such as Cooper (2005), Reder, Duncan, and Gray (1993) and Ferguson (2016) argue that when practising, social workers encounter barriers, such as the intensity and emotional demands, particularly when working in child protection, as well as from an organisational context (p.1510) though this also applies to the stresses in adult social work practice. Additionally, Burton and Revell (2018) highlight other influences, such as "the current neo-liberal political position…are key factors that hinder practitioners' ability to invoke curiosity in practice" (p.1510). This critique is well-founded, whilst these findings suggest that practitioners can and demonstrate professional curiosity and autonomy even within

the constraints of organisational environments. Some participants seemed to have shifted from reliance on their organisation to developing more of a learning environment culture, where they have trusted networks, integrated the ability to critically reflect on their own learning and see relevant resources to meet their goal of effectively working with service users (St. Jean, 2016). This approach correlates with the views stressed by Freire (1970) that individuals require opportunities for dialogue with learning at all levels of education, with a “bottom-up” pedagogic approach that creates space for peer learning, problem-posing and emancipatory practice. Furthermore, the findings indicate that participants’ approach their learning appears to have reached the realm that Fromm (1976) describes as ‘*being mode’*, in which learning is internalised as a value and integrated into a wider professional and personal identity. The section provides evidence that the participants’ personal choices extended their professional development and broadened their horizons, met their professional development, and enabled them to acquire a new body of knowledge about their specialism, suggesting an elevated level of professional curiosity. This, in turn, has enabled them to deliver a range of interventions to work more effectively and creatively with service users’ issues and meet their individual needs, as well as evidence their ability to meet the PCF domains (BASW,2018) and demonstrate they are practising with Social Work England Standards (SWE, 2019).

7.6 Theme: Career Development

A consistent theme raised by participants, and a motivating factor for undertaking CPD, was self and career development / advancement. Findings indicated that three quarters of participants (n=16) (76%) were critical that career development was not built into the organisational structure or culture and, overall, there was a lack of planning for career progression. YouGov (2021), who undertook a survey on behalf of Social Work England, reported that 67% of respondents indicated that CPD was of great value to their careers (p.13), whereas 34% of those interviewed face-to-face indicated CPD was linked to their career progression (p.17). Career development as a motivating factor for undertaking CPD has, therefore, two interlinked elements in the data, as a facilitator, and as a barrier when advancement is curtailed through organisational structures.

Further findings from participants indicated that when transitioning to a different role, specifically supervisory or management positions, formalised training was not built in. It was largely piecemeal, learning 'on the job,' rather than a set structured programme. However, as noted above more recently there have been limited opportunities introduced for new managers in the children and family area, e.g., those transitioning to the role of assistant team managers, deputy managers, or team managers. A limited number had had the opportunity to attend the bespoke programme introduced and funded by The Department for Children and Families (DfE (Practice Supervisors and Managers Programme (PSDP) - as detailed above). Findings revealed that this opportunity was widely welcomed by participants in this study, with nearly a fifth (n=4) (19%) of participants in the area of Children and Families field of practice having secured places. Their comments indicated this was a positive experience and went some way to filling the gap in that area of their practice. Other findings concerning access to management programmes revealed that nearly a quarter of participants (n=5) (24%) had accessed short internal supervision courses. Another two participants (9%) attended corporate internal organisational first level management courses and three (14%) undertook management e-learning training. Only two participants (9%), who were in roles as Team Managers, had attended external management courses and they reported they had attended these many years ago before austerity when funding then became an issue in their organisation.

The findings revealed that the main route for most participants to advance their career development and prospects was by undertaking the Practice Educator Programmes (PEPs) and taking on supervision of a student. Nearly a half (n=8) (38%) of the participants had completed both programmes and had achieved qualified Practice Educator status. Another half (n=9) (43%) were on the second phase about to qualify. The majority of participants (n=17) (81%), who had already taken this route saw this as a way of enhancing their career opportunities and a way of accessing an accredited university programme. In interviews many reflected on the positive experience of developing knowledge of models of adult teaching theories and assessment in adult education (e.g., Knowles, 1984; Kolb, 1984; Brookfield, 1990; 2002), as well as updating their knowledge of contemporary social work theories and practice requirements. They conveyed that they were able to integrate this learning

into their roles, especially pertinent to participants who had a supervisory or management role process. Participants, as previously indicated, had not received any formal management training to perform their roles effectively. The opportunity to take up the PEPs qualification had bridged that gap and equipped them to take on the assessment and supervisory roles. From working in my previous roles, I was aware that local authorities/organisations used the PEPs qualification as a stepping-stone for social workers to attain before they embarked on management or supervisory roles within the organisation as it gave social workers an array of knowledge and skills required to perform those roles.

One participant Cassie, who only had an opportunity of attending the PSDP course recently, was also on PEPs phase two. She spoke about her career plan to go into management and the way she achieved this, commenting:

> I wanted to move a step-up but skipped being a senior social worker and went straight into being an assistant team manager. As I had not undertaken PEPs, they put me on this, which I wanted to also do. This has also helped me with my new role as team manager. I guess for me it (PEPs) has helped my career path and development and my move to my current role. Additionally, it helped in areas such as supervision training, assessment, reflective practice, and all that side of things where I felt I needed to be strong, and I also had the benefit of a mentor from whom I could seek advice.

The data revealed that a minority of participants (n=3) (14%) felt aggrieved that they were unable to access the full PEPs programme through their organisation. One participant had only been allowed to go on PEPs one and was not selected for the next phase as she was had moved to a different role; another wanted to attend but was told she was too busy in her current role and the third had only been allowed to go on a Work-based Supervisor Programme. The latter was particularly disappointed not to be selected by management and was worried as her organisation had recently opened an academy and taken on permanent Practice Educators to work with students and ASYEs. Her concern was that this new shift would affect her career development and aspiration she had to become a full-time Practice Educator. The rationing approach by organisations, due to austerity was a barrier to participants' career advancement.

Many participants shared their aspirations to advance in their careers and were disappointed they were unable to access management academic programmes. They

had research independently options and found alternatives, which they were utilising for career development, as illustrated by Tom in his narrative:

> Our local authority has a good range of CPD opportunities although the training we get is making sure that we work in accordance with the policies and guidance of the local authority. I have my own career plan for management and have discussed this with my supervisor, but there are no options for a management academic programme. Our LA has some particularly good materials online in our Learning and Development Platform that are open to all staff working for the LA. This offers bite-sized training that was a good place to start for me.

Tom then went on further to share:

> I have been on PEPS 1 & 2, which has given me a level of knowledge and experience, which is where my practice is currently. Unfortunately, academic programmes are not something that local authorities will invest in, so the buck just stops there you know in terms of personal and professional development in those areas.

Tom situation reminded me of the view of Fromm (1976) and the 'having mode' due to his experience of being trapped by bureaucracy and becoming a product of his environment and socialisation. His situation meant he had limited opportunities for him moving onto more scholarly aspirations. Whereas Sara, who had a very positive view of her local authority and managers, revealed that she had been asked to attend a five-day external residential SoS supervisor's training course, which was a requirement to conduct her supervisory role within her agency. This was an externally run residential course. She stated that prior to going she had been asked to sign a form to say if she left the local authority, she would be required to pay back the money. She declined. The following narrative illustrates her distress and action she took:

> I declined to sign it. I said you are asking me to go on mandatory training to do my job, expecting me to be away for five days and asking me to pay it back if I leave? Actually, I thought the way they treated me wasn't fair as it was not a course about my career development it was a course to do my role and I wasn't going to be advantaged because they actually needed me to do it to do my role. …So, I said, "no", and thought I had better stand up for myself as they wanted me to do this course and had not got the staff to do the supervision. They (Organisation) then changed their minds, and I don't think they have done it anymore…

She then further encapsulated her views in the following:

> You know I have been here six years, so I also think it's about valuing staff, isn't it? And I think it is important that staff should not be expected to pay for

> their own training to do their job...I think there is a gap in training ..but I guess too there is a lack of support…I think that CPD has to incorporate career progression opportunities, as well as you know social issues…

There appears to be a correlation between Sara and other participants' predicaments, and the view of research conducted by Harris, (2007) and Harris and White, (2009 cited in Seden, Matthews, McCormick, and Morgan, 2011). They comment that since the shift to managerialism, social workers' practise in more complex environments "where scant attention is given to supervision and professional development where the culture is one of pressure throughout and the achievement of targets" (p.175). Whilst supervision is high on organisations' agenda in terms of case management accountability, as well as providing mandatory/statutory training to undertake roles that require specific legal duties requiring statutory qualifications, career development is not seen as an CPD organisation priority. The data in the study illustrated that this has been the experience for most participants, who did not see the organisation facilitating their professional development. Responsibilisation was key to self-development (Rose, 1996a cited in Peeters, 2019), shaped by neoliberal and managerialism principles.

Jessi, an independent practitioner, recalled that her experience and role models throughout her career had been very positive. She commented that she had encountered 'a really good tutor' on her initial social work university course, and then there were a number of subsequent tutors and trainers who had inspired her, fuelling her aspirations and drive for knowledge; she conveyed her views as follows:

> I can remember my first course being really "buzzed with excitement" because of the really good tutor I had, and this extended to other lecturers/trainers I have encountered over the years, "coming out buzzing." I want to attend a course that makes me come out buzzing and thinking Okay, what do I do with that now, how do I apply it? It is about having inspirational teachers who can then help me work through what it is I'm going to do next. I have been so impressed with other people, especially getting us to challenge. You don't want somebody who is a bit dull!

The views expressed by Jessie are important in terms of learning, professional development and integration of new knowledge and skills into practice and were mentioned by a minority of participants. Nearly half (n=9) (43%) of participants spoke of the importance of this to their learning and development but was not always their experience. This was particularly noticeable when participants were discussing

mandatory and statutory refresher programmes, where the material was said to be often repetitious, not updated and frequently delivered by in-house individuals who were not experts in their subject – a topic covered in more depth in the discussion around internal teaching and courses. Research indicates that an enthusiastic, knowledgeable trainer or educator tends to enthuse and inspire learners to delve more deeply into the subject (Zang, 2014).

Drawing on findings together, an important factor in workplace learning and undertaking CPD is the opportunity for career development that leads to self-advancement, especially the opportunity to cultivate a specific area of practice where participants wished to gain expertism. The data indicated that participants saw CPD as pivotal to their career journey and over three-quarters were critical that this opportunity was not built into the organisational structure or part of the organisational culture. Many wanted opportunities to access higher qualifications, especial to work more therapeutically with service users, for instance, in family therapy, play therapy, trauma therapy, cognitive behaviour practice to become engaged in research. Currently these options were not automatically available although one authority had a training programme for systemic family therapy. Research by (Biggart, Ward, Cook, and Schofield, 2017; Cook, Carder and Zschomler, 2022) suggests that providing CPD tailored to different career points could be a 'pull factor' to addressing retention and countering burnout.

Two-thirds of participants raised concern that there were no bespoke training courses for transitioning to a new role. For instance, when appointed onto the first rung of the career ladder as a senior social worker, a role that usually encompassed delivering supervision or management tasks, this lacked any formal training, and learning was largely piecemeal and learning 'on the job.' A number raised concern about especially in terms of carrying out supervision, management tasks, enforcing compliance and employment law where they had no knowledge or training. Some organisations provided access to an e-learning generic management programmes, open to all employees, but these did not address the specifics of social work supervision or management. As noted above only one-seventh (n=3) (14%) participates who worked in Children and Families' Teams had accessed the Practice Supervisors and Managers Programme (PSDP) commissioned and funded by the DfE. This

introduced a range of management skills that included knowledge of theoretical underpinning of the role, different techniques of supervising, mentoring, managing, assessment, and performance management. The provision of this programme would appear to recognise the gap in management and the ongoing concerns in childcare. Additionally, it acknowledges and addresses the high risks inherent in this area of practice, and the link between assessment and management of risk, which are main pillars of professional social work practice (Beck, 1992; Kemshall, 2007; Parton, 2011; Munro, 2011; Seden, 2016). Participants spoke positively about the external countrywide programme that provided an opportunity for cross-fertilisation of ideas from a wide range of local authorities, which was seen as a positive factor.

Social Work England (2021) identified management training as an area that needed to be addressed and were instrumental in supporting a partnership that delivered an eight-day hybrid programme for early career social work managers, which they plan to repeat. As a way of advancing their careers and developing a specialist role in social work over three-quarters of participants had opted for the Practice Educator Programme (PEPs), with half having completed stage one and two and the other half at stage one. The majority of participants indicated that they had taken this route as a way of advancing their career prospects but at the same time it had given them an entry into management skills that they were able to transfer to their supervisory roles within their organisation. Successful completion of the programmes also led to the University Award and qualification.

On a positive note, participants, primarily working in adult services, had the opportunity to attend external courses in order to carry out their statutory roles under specific legislation. For instance, a quarter of the group undertook the following courses: Best Interest Assessors (BIA), Mental Health Capacity Assessors (MHA); Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) (now Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) as amended by Mental Capacity Act (MCA) 2005 in 2019). On completion of a course participants receive a Certificated Award, usually linked to a university. Two participants completed The Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) course that now qualifies for a Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert) in Applied Mental Health Practice (AMHP).

There was less opportunity for undertaking certificated courses in children and family services with just over a fifth of participants accessing certificated courses in either systemic practice, systemic family therapy and two participants paying for post-graduate courses in child protection awards. The opportunity to attend these types of post-qualifying programmes is contingent on organisational funding or to self-fund. There is currently no automatic provision for fully funded advanced courses (e.g., MA/MSc in Research Methods/Research; MA in Family Therapy, or therapeutic programmes) although there are a few charities/trusts where individuals can make applications.

The Conservative led Coalition Government commissioned reports concerning social work practice and its future, which made recommendations for funding to be available for more advanced social work study. For example, Lord Laming's (2009) report produced prior to them coming into at recommendation 27 (p.54) stated that: "the government should introduce a fully funded practice-focused children's social work postgraduate qualification". A further report by Croisdale-Appleby (2014), that was well received for example by BASW, Department of Health, Chief Social Worker, and individual social workers. In his recommendation 20 – that focused on CPD he asserted there was "a pressing need for a new comprehensive continuing development framework for the profession" (p.89) and recommended that it was based on GMC model of *Continuing professional development: guidance for all doctors* (GMC, 2012). Despite the strength of these recommendations, the data from this study suggest that, more than a decade on, the structural shift envisaged has not materialised, leaving career development to remain, for the majority of participants, a matter of personal initiative, perseverance, and self-funded ambition, rather than an embedded organisational entitlement.

7.7 Theme: Supervision and Support Networks

This section integrates the findings and discussion relating to supervision and the wider support networks that participants identified as enablers of their CPD. The original sub-themes from the findings have been retained Supervision Context, Supervision Experience, Supervisory Styles, Cross-fertilisation of Ideas and Peer Supervision, with analytical points from discussion distributed across the relevant sub-section, concluding by drawing the strands together.

The role of supervision within social work is not a new phenomenon. The Charity Organisation Society organised a social work supervision course as early as 1911, with earlier literature reference (Pierson, 2011; Bamford, 2015) to the role and supervision of voluntary caseworkers and the tenets of good practice in the United States (Kadushin,1992). Over the years supervision has been written about extensively by a number of authors (Payne and Scott, 1982; Kadushin, 1992; Morrison,2003; Gould and Baldwin, 2004; Davys and Beddoe, 2009 2010, 2013; Manthorpe, Moriarty, Hussein, Stevens, and Sharpe, 2015; Beddoe and Davys, 2016; Davys, May, Burns and O'Connell, 2017), although there are limited studies written about its formal evaluation or effectiveness. Laming (2003) saw supervision as the 'cornerstone' of good social work practice and "should be seen as functioning effectively at all levels of the organisation" (p.12), with Munro (2011) correlating with his view. Other authors (e.g., Morrison, 2003; Fook, 2009; Beddoe, 2010, 2013) have their own specific views and frameworks which largely fall into three areas, educative, supportive, and managerial functions, which would include accountability. The supervision function is not, however, without criticism for its over centralised concentration on issues or risk. Davys and Beddoe (2010), question whether it is for the benefit of staff or service users, observing that its focus has largely become focused on surveillance of risk on individuals.

7. 7.1 Theme: Supervision Context

Over three quarters of the research participants (n=17) (81%) indicated that currently they had a positive relationship with their line managers and had supervision generally once a month. These sessions however were prone to cancellation due to organisational crises, staff shortages, urgent operational development, and gaps when a temporary or agency line manager left, all cited by participants as recurrent reasons. Nearly a quarter (n=5) (24%) had directly experienced this in their current positions and the data indicated that multiple changes of manager were a common feature in their organisations.

Two independent participants, Jessi, and Dave and another participant, Rob, who was a service manager in private hospital, all employed senior social work consultants for clinical supervision monthly, which they found beneficial. Another Adam, an assistant manager, advised that he did not currently have a line manager and had six temporary managers in the last six months, which he found a barrier to his development. He disclosed he found this very frustrating and disrupting and stated he was determined not to replicate this pattern for his supervisees, making concerted efforts to provide stability

and consistency. Additionally, he reported he made time for team meetings to be creative and focused for staff with a collaborative agenda that met their needs.

7.7.2 Theme: Supervision Experience

The participants' experience of supervision varied considerably in content and orientation ranging from positive, developmental sessions to those dominated by case management. As noted, three quarters (n=17) (81%) of participants considered their supervisory relationship to be positive and supportive. Zara, for example, indicated that personal and career development were aspects of her supervision, conveying:

> I quite like going on training and over the years I have done quite a lot. So, a lot that comes through I have already done but if something comes through which is quite interesting and its new to me, I will put myself forward. Also, in supervision there will be a discussion around professional development and pathways. I think a good manager really encourages you to develop yourself. My manager is supportive of courses I have chosen, and she will also identify areas and suggest courses for my development. This also happens when we discuss areas of career development in my annual appraisal and this is helpful.

Melissa similarly experienced supervision as developmental, particularly in unpicking the supervisory dimension of her own role: She remarked:

> I see supervision as really beneficial. It really helps, especially when I am overwhelmed about different things. I find it helpful reflecting on me as a supervisor, especially the differentiation /diversity between different workers their experiences and skills and have learnt that it is not good to compare workers in any way. It's helped me to gain insight and draw on different approaches. My supervisor is really helpful, and it's been developmental for me.

Whereas Rob's experience of multi-disciplinary clinical supervision increased both his knowledge and intervention techniques reflecting:

> In my role I have regular supervision with an experienced external social worker, once a month. He is very knowledgeable and reflective on practice issues. In our team we also have multi-disciplinary clinical supervision with members of the treatment team. We also have reflective supervision sessions where different team members come together to discuss how to work with different patients. This increases our knowledge and skills about methods of intervention.

Elsie talked about the positive support she receives from her supervisor and appears to model this in her own practice, commenting:

> I have a supervisor who is very supportive regarding the training I want to do. Obviously, if it is in terms of time, they are OK, but if it is in terms of money, they can't decide that on their own and it would have to go up to the next level. My line

> manager is very supportive of me and my career and, if for instance, I said I would like to take another student as well, she completely supports me. I wouldn't expect them to be chasing me around saying are you going on training? I don't need them to do that. With my supervisees I don't just do the tick-box type supervision…I will look for opportunities for social workers. There are lots of things that I don't do very well, but I think I'm particularly good at encouraging people to push themselves.

Sara likewise highlighted that undertaking CPD was self-initiated, but also acknowledged the positive influence of her line manager sharing the following views:

> I was really fortunate that I had managers who really wanted me to become a senior social worker. I think I had been in the team less than three years when they suggested I was kind of at that level and they wanted me to move to that position, so they said they were going to support me in whatever I needed. I then became involved in some additional training (PEPs) which helped me to get where I wanted to be and where they saw me working. It was a really important acknowledgement of what you were doing.

Seb expressed disappointment that supervision prioritised case management over and above reflective supervision or personal development. To counter this barrier Seb had sought out alternatives and positively engaged with peer supervision, expressing his views as follows:

> I have regular supervision, and because of the nature of the work we do we are supposed to have reflective supervision but one thing I've realised is that we don't get it because everything is about case management; we might occasionally get maybe one reflective supervision… Sometimes managers are too busy, and they don't really get the time to offer reflective supervision…So we now do this in our peer group.

Debra spoke about her positive experience of being a student social worker especially supervision where she highlighted, she had been able to unpick cases and learn how to apply theory, which she said she found invaluable to her learning. In later discussions she referred to this again saying as a student they were always talking about theories, but when moving onto her current experience of supervision she exclaimed:

> Now, oh my gosh, we don't talk about theories anymore, but we should do. It is very much like "firefighting."

Another participant Naomi acknowledged that in her role as an Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) she was subject to a complex legal framework to decide whether or not individuals should be detained. Consequently, from her perspective, supervision

was based on accountability and surveillance. She illustrates this in the following narrative:

> Our supervision is geared to ensuring that you are practising in a legal way and all of those areas…we are also closely monitored as an Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHP). It's more obvious what has to be done, and you need to ensure it is maintained. You really have to maintain a good Portfolio of your AMHP work and actually I don't interestingly let it slip. I keep it all up to date.

Derek was positive about the support he received from his supervisor but questioned their role and expertise to provide supervision at the level he required for some of the complex investigatory issues he was required to assess. Below he describes this perspective and outlines the rationale for his view:

> We have individual supervision but also team supervision. My supervisor discusses my development and is supportive of courses I select. However, I've thought quite a lot about the type of supervision we get as part of our job is investigation. I think there should not be a manager but a consultant so that the person who is undertaking the investigation can have an experienced professional who is an expert in child protection. Often the managers are not themselves experts, they don't have enough expertise and often they're too busy to provide that level of supervision. Local Authorities already do that as they employ people but only to do the conferences, whereas what is actually needed is the expertise at the investigation stage, not just the conference stage when decisions are made.

Interpreting this body of data, the supervisory experience of participants ranged across the educative, supportive, and managerial functions identified in the literature (Morrison, 2003; Askeland and Fook, 2009; Beddoe, 2010, 2013), with considerable variation in balance. Approximately half of participants reported sessions that were evenly balanced between the management and critical reflection, while around a third were critical that supervision was too case-management focused, with several stating that they never had the opportunity to engage in critical reflection on their practice. Several reported only encountering this practice through the Practice Educator Programme, where it became a required element of work with their student. A small number described this experience as invigorating their practice and increasing their integration of theory. This is significant because Reflective Practice in social work (Dewey, 1910; Schön, 1983,1991; Johns, 1994; Fook, 1999, 2007; Argyris, 2004; Brookfield, 2009) is neither new nor optional under current regulation (SWE,2019) with its overall objective what Freire (1970) describes as "critical consciousness" (p.7) is essential to developing practice. Seb's account confirms the findings of Wilson, *et al.,* (2008) that since the shift towards case management, "limited time was given to education and support", with the implication that

supervision offering “a more balanced” combination of “case management, support and education” would provide social workers with “a more enriching experience (cited in Seden and McCormick, 2011, p177). Seb’s response, seeking out peer supervisor mirrors a wider pattern in the data, discussed below. Munson’s (2002) analysis of the supervisor-supervisee dyad highlights the more powerful position of the supervisor, who has “power by virtue of their positions” and need not work hard to form a relationship, which is considered central to success, as is the formation of trust. The data highlighted the surveillance critique. Naomi’s narrative links to two themes in the theoretical framework. Freire (1970) account of banking education, in which curriculum is tightly controlled by the legislative framework of surveillance. Powell and Khan (2012) describe the advancement of surveillance techniques in social work as “objectifying effect of audit and the way this exploits electronic capabilities for surveillance” (p.138). Pivotally, Derek’s point about supervisor experience speaks to a long-standing concern in literature (Fook, 1996; Hawkins and Shohet, 2006) that supervisors require good-quality training and contemporary practice knowledge if supervision is to be effective. Several participants in this study, as elsewhere in the thesis, raised concerns about lack of training for transition to supervisory and managerial positions, an area that requires organisational attention.

7.7.3 Theme: Supervisory Styles

Findings indicate that there was no one supervisory model and style used within supervision and the use by and experienced by participants was largely dependent on supervisor’s own experience or supervision training, which, as indicated within this research was very sparse. Participants who had recently attended the PSDP programme were more familiar with specific frameworks, including reflective supervision, which builds on Schön’s (1992) work; the Developmental model (Kim, Park, Piece, and Hall, 2018) and Morrison’s 4x4x4 integrated model, as well as Clinical Supervision by Carpenter, *et al.,* (2012).

Five participants’ (n=5) (24%) (Cath, Adam, Cassie, Sara, and Elsie) spoke specifically about the influence of supervisory styles and how these had shaped their development as supervisors. Cath remarked:

> My manager and I have similar management styles. We are task centred, very direct. I also think I am very directive 90% of the time, similar to my manager. She's very caring and supportive and I think my staff would probably say that I

> am very caring towards them whether they have a personal or professional issue with which they are dealing…I think my supervisory style is influenced by my own experience of being supervised over the years, as well as courses I have attended.

Adam drew on his early social work experience in a team where he was able to benefit from the expertise of his colleagues. However, he also highlighted lack of encouragement by his manager to undertake CPD, as well as a negative attitude towards ongoing learning. He described how these observations influenced his practice when he became a team manager, sharing:

> When I first qualified as a social worker I went to a team where colleagues were incredibly experienced. This was very helpful to my development. However, the staff were like "been there, done that, got the T shirt," so it wasn't really a culture of CPD, you just got on with it. There was no pressure by team manager to do CPD, no encouragement and they just let you get on with it. It was only when I moved on did, I get different experiences…since I have been a supervisor/manager I have tried to do things differently and create a 'culture of learning' by restructuring team meetings and adding in team development. I cascade articles down to the team so they can dip into them and suggest discussion on points at team meetings and encourage staff to do likewise, which they have done. So far, the feedback has been really positive and there is more interest.

Whereas Cassie disclosed that since qualifying she had had numerous temporary agency managers and recalled a very negative experience when she moved to her first management role. This affected her confidence although she felt on the positive side she felt she learnt under the experience and was determine not to repeat this in her supervisory role. Cassie spoke of the positive benefits of securing a place on a formal management course and how she was able to translate this to her role:

> It gave me time to look across the main landscape of supervision and gain knowledge and skills as a supervisor and supervisory skills.

Interpreting these findings, supervisory style emerges as a relational and biographical phenomenon, which is shaped by participants' own experience of being supervised, by the culture of the teams within the organisation and by formal training. Adam's account demonstrates how negative early experience can be transformed into a purposeful alternative when acquiring positional power where his aim was to construct "a culture of learning" through team meetings, article-sharing and developmental discussions that echoes the work of Wenger's (1998) communities of practice and Lewin's (1939)

participative leadership approach. The findings also reinforce wider concerns in the data that there is insufficient structural planning to support practitioners' transition into supervisory roles, with only a minority being able to access formal courses. Overall, more investment in formal training would address issues reported in literature (Fook, 1996; Hawkins and Shohet, 2006) and improve quality available.

7.7.4 Theme: Cross-fertilisation of Ideas

Findings indicated that over three-quarters (n=16) (76%) considered it important to their personal and professional development to have the opportunity to share experiences and learn from colleagues, not only within their own organisations but also across geographical boundaries. Participants mentioned this as a highly valued experience and spoke of the value of meeting colleagues from different organisations and sharing experiences and practice. Although, to some extent, this has been possible with the shift to on-line provision via the use of Microsoft Teams, Zoom or other IT forums, findings suggest that during this study this was an exception, rather than the norm. The majority of training opportunities appeared to be organisationally led and internally provided. Whilst on-line programmes offer opportunities for small-group discussions to share ideas and knowledge through break-out rooms, participants were clear that this was different from F2F interaction where you can build relationships and tease out issues, with this enabling you to feel more confident about giving your views in a more open way.

Elsie's experience of the Practice Supervisors' Development Programme (PSDP) (DfE/Tavistock), a residential programme commissioned by Department of Education was powerful and a positive experience, enabling to learn and influence her role, she commented:

> It was a great opportunity being able to meet other managers who worked in very demographically different from your own. It was great to be able to look at, and compare, management styles. They say you learn best from your peers. Essentially, you know things like deciding what kind of manager/supervisor you want to be, what will that look like, and why is it that we do this like that? It was really good as it was residential, and it created the space that you needed. You couldn't go to your laptop or do any other work. You go there and engage in it, and it is really that space that was important for me. The mind space was brilliant.

Cassie, assistant team manager, was equally positive about having the opportunity to go on the same programme. As noted in Cassie's previous views when Cassie transitioned to her new role as a supervisor her supervision sessions were clouded by her manager's negative comments. However, through her resilience, her commitment to

self-development and learning she managed to build on the positive elements. Cassie went onto describe how attendance at the PSDP course had been a positive experience for her, especially the opportunity for cross-fertilisation of ideas, sharing her views below:

> It was really lovely going on the course as I met a group of supervisors and managers that were the same as me. They'd had similar backgrounds and they were in practice for a similar time to me. I recognised that I did not need to be too harsh on myself. The course and sharing gave me the tools, confidence, and backup to what I already knew….I did not start that course until I had been in my role for a year and after having had a very difficult time and situations to contend with but then attending the course I felt more confident managing staff and students…

Milli described an online external course with international reach, commenting:

> Although it wasn't face-to-face in the breakout groups in the one I attended there was common ground; we discussed issues such as religion, roles, expectations, and values, and then fed back to the group. It was a bonus interacting with people from different countries and sharing experiences.

Stewart spoke positively about being able to attend external courses and the benefits this had on practice although these opportunities had lessened in recent times, recalling:

> We used to regularly have the opportunity of going on external courses, I don't know now how many over the years it is since we had that opportunity but some, though not as much as I would like. We do still now have some opportunity of undertaking training with a neighbouring local authority to have updates on law, or specific focused courses. I would always encourage people to go on these as there are a lot of benefits from sharing practice and learning from others.

Around half of participants (n=10) (48%) spoke positively about external courses, share insights into practice, learn about other initiatives in other areas and evaluate whether they could translate these to their own area of practice. Many expressed a sense of loss of opportunities due to the financial constraints of austerity, and the negative effect they perceived it had on their knowledge and development.

Cross-fertilisation of ideas emerges as a vital but increasingly distant feature of the contemporary social work CPD landscape. The PSDP demonstrated that time and space was protected, with an opportunity of peer learning from colleagues in different locations. Cearley (2004, cited in SCIE, 2015) found that "the supervisors empowering behaviours significantly affected the supervisees sense of empowerment" (p.8), increasing decision-making capacity, an effect that Elsie's and Cassie's accounts illustrate. Rajagopal, Brinke, and Sloep (2010) similarly suggest this can be achieved by taking a strategic

approach to building opportunities where they can undertake individual and collaborative reflection and, secondly, join professional person-centred networks. Pivotal to the findings, participants emphasised a clear sense of loss they felt at the reduction in opportunities to attend external courses due to austerity that had been imposed by financial constraints, its negative effect and reliant on internal provision, and lack of stimulus from face-to-face external courses provide.

7.7.5 Theme: Peer Supervision

Increasingly, supervision, support and development are not confined to one mode of delivery. As indicated participants drew on a range of resources, both internally within their organisations, and externally as highlighted. Peer supervision, the process where one worker individually seeks supervision from another worker in order to reflect on a case or specific issue/problem, or alternatively where a number of individuals group together to form a group to discuss a case, or problem. Participants mentioned both these methods as available to them in their organisations, or they sought them out independently.

Findings indicated that over half of participants (n=11) (52%) mentioned that peer supervision was a supportive, helpful, and a learning experience for them with similar findings in research conducted by Halton, Powell and Scanlan (2015) and Smith (2024). However, data also revealed that during the Covid 19 pandemic and lockdown, when the majority of participants were working from home, peer contact functioned as a key compensatory mechanism for the absence of office-based and offered opportunities for informal exchange and support. Data revealed that in some organisations this process became more formalised as an option to offer support. However, most participants referred to homeworking as being particularly isolating as they did not have face-to-face contact with colleagues. However, this appeared to have more impact on them specifically when they had had contact with service users, children, or families when undertaking an intervention or assessment either face to face, or via Zoom. A number of colleagues mentioned isolation in the context of their normal practice, which would be returning to an office where they had the opportunity of speaking with a colleague where you could ‘unload, reflect and check out’ issues relating to the case. The move to homeworking no longer offered this as an option.

Lara, a line manager, whose organisation had introduced the Signs of Safety as the practice model described the introduction of new structured supervisory support:

> We have introduced peer supervision for social work level, and a separate one at manager level that is just starting. Our objective is to get as many heads as possible onto some of these problems, and not just one. This is something that is very much wanted but how much time we actually have to do it is a bit of an issue. Personally, I would love to have every case reviewed this way once every six months. We could all get our heads around them and understand what is going on for some families, but with 140 cases under my line management that is just not possible. But the peer supervision is very useful in trying to support workers and families but again it is a case of time and the ability to make sure that we're doing the work, but it is difficult with other priorities and competing demands.

Seb, as referred to earlier had shifted to peer supervision to counter the more case-management dominated formal supervision he inherited adding:

> …we now do this in our peer supervision. Sometimes we ask someone to bring a case where they really have struggled and where they need help. Other times we read an article and discuss it. This gives us the opportunity to reflect and see things differently, especially from different individuals' perspectives…we look at different ways of working, taking a more holistic approach that got a positive outcome. It has really helped me…

Vera made a similar point about the historical absence of reflective practice in supervision:

> It is interesting because over the years I don't think I've ever really had reflective practice in supervision, and I have never been given an opportunity…I don't think supervision historically has been very good for that.

She went on to talk positively about how supervision had changed in her organisation since it had introduced the Strength's Approach as the agency model. Vera reported this also encountered a different approach to supervision which she illustrated in the following narrative:

> Since the drive to integrate the Strengths Approach into our work we are looking at things from a different perspective. We have weekly reflective practice meetings, which are good, they are really positive. I have noticed the difference, especially from newly qualified members of the team who seem enthusiastic. The peer support has been particularly good now that we are homeworking. It is good to reflect and get informal feedback from colleagues…It has been interesting as I am now using this in supervision with my student. The other day we were applying this to the Lifespan Model (Maclean and Harrison, 2015), struggling to get our heads around an issue and its application to our aged customers.

Adam when thinking through positive support to facilitate personal growth and practice captured this by following points:

> You have got CPD, the formal type of training, but also there is the informal side where you are also learning from colleagues. Just having peer supervision and a 'culture of learning' also increases knowledge and skills, which is also so important.

Adam's 's perspective correlates with other participants' perspectives of the value he placed on peer supervision and importance of an environment committed to a culture of learning.

Interpreting these findings, peer supervision emerges as both a supplement and, in many cases, a corrective to formal supervision. Pivotal here is the participants' use of peer contact as "sounding board" and a "container for emotions" (Bion, 1962). More than half of the participants valued the support of colleagues, particularly for the post-visit "offload, reflect and check out" function that Ferguson (2018) identifies as central to social work, and which is not easily reproduced in remote working. The pandemic foregrounded the importance of this function, with research (Manthorpe, *et al.,* 2012; Marshal, *et al.,* 2021; Kingstone, *et al.,* 2022) confirming the isolating effects of homeworking and lockdown. The literature on workplace learning (Lloyd, Pfeiffer, Dominish, Heading, and Schmidt, 2014; Ferguson, 2021) and on case discussion, observation, guidance and mentoring (Billet, 2001; Ferguson, 2021) similarly identify these as principal vehicles through which practitioners learn, and which organisations had introduced team or group supervision forums to develop the agency model of practice, with practitioners speaking positively about the protected space these emancipatory principles, rather than becoming an arena of management surveillance. Foucault (1977) reminds us, the gaze is "always receptive" to such purposes (p.89), and it is important to insulate peer supervision to retain its developmental and supportive goal.

7.8 Theme: Social Work England Regulatory Body and Registration

The semi-structured interview schedule of questions with the participants did not have a specific question concerning the regulatory body or about registration. However, findings indicate that all participants (n=21) (100%) interviewed referred to SWE

functions, for example, the need to register and comply with the regulations in order to practise, as well as their views about SWE as an organisation and its role.

In chapter five some of perspectives gleaned from the participants' data has already been reported. To recap, the Professional Capabilities Framework Domain 9 (BASW, 2018), as well as Social Work England Standard 4 (SWE, 2019), both place an obligation on social workers to maintain their continuing professional development. SWE (2019) has a requirement for social workers to re-register each year and currently submit two pieces of continuing professional development that meets the criteria as updated on 9th April 2020.

Participants data indicates they felt very strongly about professional accountability and their desire to be able to demonstrate and evidence this in their practice. The following extract from Elsie expressed the point well:

> …So yes, I think there does need to be a governing body or someone /something needs to hold us to account…But whether it (SWE) is the right mechanism at the moment I am not sure, but it is early days yet, isn't it? I am not sure, but equally I don't know whether it would be better to hand it to individual organisations so that they take some ownership for it and support their staff…I suppose there are a million different counter arguments to everything.

Whereas another participant Lucy shared the view that moving to a regulatory body specifically for social workers, and a requirement to evidence CPD was a positive move:

> So, for me, it is about my Professional Registration, but much more….I think that there is something positive about having a regulator for social workers instead of with the others like the HCPC and I think because then it gives us an identity as social workers……I think it is overdue actually as under HCPC there was always the threat of audit but I think that having it as a requirement that you have to upload your CPD for me makes me very much more…for instance, I am not just reading an article but this is about my development and I should log this as I am learning from it. So, it has made it more relevant than before and there is not the potential last-minute rush to try and find the training certificates. I also like the fact that it asks you to reflect on what you have learnt and it is not just a tick-box exercise. It is important for social work and that Social Work England has got it as one of their priorities is important too.

Similarly to Lucy, another participant Debra mentioned the "threat" of HCPC randomly selecting you to "share" your CPD. She went onto say:

> …with Social Work England everyone has to do it, and I was a bit like, um, this isn't very demanding and then actually it makes sense to do because it is good for you, and you are able to log the things you've done. Before with HCPC it was different…I know through word-of-mouth people said…oh gosh I've been randomly selected and they didn't have anything, and they were caught out.

Another participant Cassie raised a similar point about the difference and clarity in expectations between the former (HCPC) and current (SWE) regulators, making the point as follows:

> There is part of it where I need to know that I'm doing it (CPD) and need to actually be uploading it on to my social work account in SWE. I think though there is still that part with SWE, as there was with HCPC, when you could think you might be one who is pulled out for them to see that you had done something recognisable as CPD. So, I guess, there is now more of an element with current requirements by SWE than this occurring than there was under the previous regulator.

Participant Milli commented that within her organisation CPD was promoted and supported in order to remain registered with SWE:

> CPD for me is important as it keeps me up to date and relevant, as well as it is essential for my Social Work England registration. In my organisation there is a big emphasis on Social Work England (SWE) and what CPD you have to submit…When it came in, our new Principal Social Worker organised sessions on how to record your CPD, how to be enrolled, and also there was an emphasis on the value of undertaking professional development. They have really promoted CPD training and supporting us by letting us know what is available and where there are free spaces.

Stewart reflecting on his experience of over twenty-five years in social work spoke about the changes that he had observed, observing it was more professionalised and acknowledged through registration. He observed from his perspective:

> Social work is much more professionalised than it was twenty-five years ago when I used to not particularly like to say I was a social worker when I went out and met people or associated with others. But now I actually feel I'm proud to be a social worker and you that you have to be registered with SWE. Also, you have to keep your professional development going as part of that. It's really interesting how this (Social Work) has now, sort of, become a closed shop if you like.

Stewart suggested that social workers having a 'protected title,' as well as a regulatory authority, was a positive shift, commenting:

> I think it is important that social workers have a protected title and they have to register with Social Work England…. they have a much more disciplined approach, and it is about 'quality, not quantity.'

Similarly, Tom observed that CPD was the way forward to improved practice:

> I suppose the difference between HCPC and SWE is that it is not about attending five or six training sessions…but with SWE the reflection becomes key…so it is about using critical reflection analysis skills that comes out of reflecting on those pieces of work. This is key to improving future practice. I think the idea from SWE about reflecting on what has been done, or what has been done to improve your practice is the way forward.

However, exploring the role of SWE and CPD with Sara she took a more critical perspective and was not confident that the renewal tasks required by SWE were able to evaluate whether, or not, social workers were competent to practice. In her response she questioned whether SWE was the correct forum for assessing social work competence in practice and whether this should lay within the organisation who more first-hand knowledge had, she observed:

> I don't think Social Work England's role really improves what we do: it feels quite tokenistic that, you know we have to upload pieces of evidence. It doesn't really demonstrate our capabilities. I don't think it really demonstrates the learning in work we will have done in order to evidence that we've met a require standard. I think our mangers would be able to confirm whether, on the whole, we as practitioners, are meeting the required standards…I mean I think that there has to be a better way of evidencing what you are doing…it would be much more beneficial actually if management were given the responsibility to assess their own social workers, in the same way that maybe we do the students at the moment.

Finally, participant Elsa, was in complete agreement with CPD being part of the remit for social workers to social workers having a regulator SWE registration and requirements. However, she also considered that range of societal issues should be taken into consideration by the government and politicians before requirements are imposed on social workers. Her views are encapsulated in the following:

> I agree with the principle of undertaking CPD and it being a requirement for registration with Social Work England. It is right, and important, to remain up to date. We need to do this; we can't be complacent about our practice because if we do, we are not going to be able to work safely with people.

As previously recorded in the data findings Elsa alluded to the connection between CPD and registration being politically driven, here she expanded further on her perspective about social workers being subjected to regulation, stating:

> [regulation)…it's obviously more politically driven in England than in any of the other three countries, which is interesting. And I think it is a reaction to when things have gone wrong…I think politically speaking it draws focus on to the social work profession rather than thinking about the wider systemic, institutional, and contextual issues that lead to some of these really awful cases where things have gone wrong. It (regulation) is very much a government and politicians' decision really. I realise this is very much a political view, but this is very much what I think.

Drawing the findings together, although the interview schedule did not include a specific question about Social Work England, registration, or compliance conditions to re-register, all participants referred to its function and were familiar with their obligations and the various processes required to confirm re-registration. The majority welcomed the shift from HCPC to SWE (2019) and having a bespoke regulatory body, with more clarity about the exact requirements to be submitted for re-registration, whilst at the same time recognising that this entailed extra demands on their time, the majority view was that as social work professionals it was incumbent on them to be professionally accountable for their practice.

A minority were sceptical as to whether SWE was the correct forum and questioned whether the limited amount of CPD submitted for evaluation could alone determine an individual's capacity to have met the standard, or whether more evidence was required, for instance, a manager's report on an individual's capacity to continue to practise. The majority welcomed the shift from HCPC to SWE (2019) and having a bespoke regulatory body, with more clarity about the exact requirements to be submitted for re-registration, especially CPD submissions encompassing critical reflection and analysis, that was seen as a way to improving practice. As noted in the data, a minority had felt under "threat" that their CPD would be randomly called in for audit when HCPC was the regulator and spoke about the additional pressure they felt under. However, 2.5% of SWE CPD submissions were liable to be sampled and audited. However, in 2024 it was decided to drop the sampling review that year, as SWE wanted to review the CPD process, and in 2025 it was decided there would be no checks on CPD submitted again for re-registration that year, with SWE currently reviewing the process (Samuel, 2025).

7.9. Chapter Summary

This chapter gave voice to participants' perspectives on an array of different areas that affect their day-to-day practice, including a range of facilitators and enablers

available within their organisations, and externally through personal ingenuity and creativity. What the data evidence is that there was no shortage of aspirations within the cohort to build on their knowledge, skills, and competence through engagement in professional development, advancing their intervention skills alongside career development. Overall, there was a desire to provide service users with the best outcomes to increase their life opportunities, through more expert knowledge and providing therapeutic interventions. Despite the many organisational and contextual barriers and challenges, which will be explored in the next chapter, they were not thwarted, putting centre-stage their commitment to service users and self-development.

Chapter Eight: Barriers and Challenges to CPD

8.1 Introduction

This section will focus on data drawn from the twenty-one semi-structured interviews with participants around the themes that encapsulate barriers and challenges to Continuing Professional Development (CPD). It covers the following themes: Lack of Protected Study Time; Excessive Workload/Caseloads; Lack of Headspace/Brain Space and Mindspace; Lack of expertise teaching on internal courses; Lack of education and training opportunities for transition to management roles; Lack of career development embedded into organisational culture; Staff resistance to CPD – Impact on other workers; Lack of relevant physical environment.

8.2 Theme: Lack of Protected Study Time

Data from over two-thirds of participants (n=15) (71%) indicated that participants were allocated no protected study time in their working week, or annually, from their organisations. This finding is very similar to that found in research conducted by YouGov (2021) on behalf of Social Work England where it cites that 60% of respondents reported that there was no allocation of time in during their core working week to undertake CPD and it had to be done in their own time. It is supported by more recent research by the Department of Education (2023), which reported that 63% of participants cited insufficient time during the working day to undertake CPD. Lack of protected time is therefore not a new finding; it is prominent in the literature both currently and historically.

Participants candidly indicated that lack of protected study time was stressful and a major barrier to educational and learning opportunities on a regular, planned basis. There was a general desire by participants to engage in CPD that would enable them to develop more expertism in their area of practice, and a recognition of the changing needs of society and the challenges of social work practice in contemporary society. The majority of participants wanted to be able to provide a diverse range of interventions to meet the complex needs of individual service users, as well as feel confident in their practice. For most participants, however, CPD was seen as ‘an add-on’ or undertaken as a ‘rushed job,’ either to meet the regulatory timetable or organisational statutory requirements and had to be fitted in around work or home commitments. That this situation did not always enable critical analysis and reflection

on the learning content of material to seamlessly integrate this into practice or draw on a wider perspective to aid understanding. Many participants indicated that they found this frustrating and they were not fully able to benefit from the CPD experience. Time and space to critically reflect on practice experiences was valued and an important area for participants (Fook and Askeland, 2007; Ferguson, 2018) and are an essential skill and requirement of social work practice (BASW, 2018, PCF, Domain 6; SWE Standards, 2019). Additionally, participants reported that with the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic introduced further pressures: the shift to virtual learning necessitated additional time upskilling on technological skills in order to engage with service users, other professionals, and virtual training. These factors impacted on their time which had a knock-on effect, lessening time for critical reflection on CPD training and, additionally, impacted on work/life balance, heightened by more home working and professional isolation.

Cassie, an assistant team manager, emphasised the constant pressure and time constraints of working within a front-line Children and Families local authority team and how this left little time for 'thinking or mind space' to engage in CPD, commenting:

> The real pressure is time to do CPD and training, especially in a local authority, who want you to do training but there are barriers in your day job. I guess because there are so many things to do, such as statutory Child Protection discussions, and meetings that have to take place, your diary ends up so full. You then don't have time to think or prioritise training, even though you would like to….

Cassie continued this theme talking about she managed her pressurised role alongside the reality of the personal versus work conflicts she encountered:

> I guess people work and manage in different ways. At present I've got a young family, and I do my job from nine to five and then go and pick up my children. I am then available on the phone as and when I am needed by my workers…you have to accept that there are times when you have to catch up and do quite a bit of work at home to do your CPD.

Cassie's narrative correlates with the survey by the British Attitudes Survey (2023) that reported that 67% of working women undertook the bulk of the domestic chores, and continue to responsible for childcare, referred to as the 'second shift' (Hochschild and Machung, 2012).

Another assistant manager, Lucy, highlighted similar circumstances, especially the tensions and interruptions since the shift to virtual training, and the social worker's responsibility to organise cover or back-up for the absence when attending training. She also commented that with staff shortages and/or staff illness recently encountered by her team, this was, usually, impossible to arrange:

> The short answer is no; we don't get study leave. We get information on what training is on, but then it is up to you to sort it out. One of the big things that has impacted on me when I am doing training or researching is the constant emails that are pinging and I have only recently learnt that on Microsoft teams that there is this 'do not disturb' but never knew it was available as I had not had any training. If you have been doing a whole day training, say 10.a.m. to 3 p.m. you really need time to digest what you have learnt especially if you are learning this way, but you don't have that. You have meetings booked in before and after, so you don't have the reflection time, so it makes things so much more challenging to try and integrate this into your practice.

Lucy raises the importance of social workers needing to have time to assimilate, reflect, analyse, as well as integrate new learning and skills into practice. The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) (2018) Domain 6 requires social workers to apply critical reflection and analysis to inform and provide a rationale for professional decision-making and practice. Additionally, critical reflection is a requirement of Social Work England Professional Standards Four (SWE, 2019). CPD aids critical reflection, with the objective of embedding this into practice, developing skills to analyse issues from different perspectives, gain a deeper understanding of ethical and societal dilemmas, and consider different ways of thinking and solving problems (Fook and Askeland,2007; Munro, 2011; Pockett, Napier, and Giles, 2011) in order to make positive changes in future practice.

In contrast to these accounts two participants (Jessi and Dave) (n=2) (9%), who were independent practitioners, remarked they were able to organise and plan CPD training activities around their work commitments, as they had the control and autonomy over their own work schedules. Additionally, Rob, who worked in a private hospital, indicated he was able to plan and facilitate CPD training within his working day. However, he reported that he also used personal time for reading articles to update research knowledge, as well as time and space for critical reflection and to complete the regulator's documentation. All three participants' accounts indicate that they have adopted neoliberal principles, which transfers to the citizen responsibilities

for core functions, thereby reducing the need for state interventions. This links to Rose's (1996a) concept of responsibilisation (cited in Peeters, 2019).

Whilst Derek pointed out his organisation did not allocate any formal study time to undertake CPD he had some autonomy over his work schedule as it included an amount of unprotected time which could be used in several ways. He shared:

> We don't have any study leave for CPD in my team, but we do have an amount of unallocated time each month that we can use for training, so you can use that for CPD, which is really helpful.

When reflecting on lack of study leave, Derek spoke positively of the development of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) (DfE,2012) that gave newly qualified social workers continuing development in their roles and factored in study time to undertake learning, as well as independent study. However, from his experience once this programme was completed, although there was access to agency courses, focused learning and study time were no longer factored in as a priority.

Whereas Elsie spoke about lack of protected time, as well organisational support to undertake CPD, contrasting this with her experience of when she was a prequalifying student on a work-based social work programme. She was allocated one day a week for study leave to undertake her academic work, which was similar to students on conventional social work programmes. She described at that time having an excellent manager at that time who encouraged her and insisted that she took study leave. Illustrating her views:

> At that point I didn't have a full caseload and didn't have commitments in terms of work. I had a manageable sort of workload and duties and always used to take my study day; it was always honoured and there was never any suggestion I couldn't take it. Um, but then the organisation was supportive of my academic learning.

It was evident from Elsie's recall that she recognised she needed to apply herself to the academic side of her programme. However, post-qualifying, her authority did not give study leave for CPD unless it was linked to an academic course at university, for instance the Practice Teachers' Programme when four days were allocated. This was similar to other participants' accounts of study leave being granted by their organisation when undertaking similar courses. Elsie went on to indicated this was

only one of the pressing factors that affected CPD, with large workloads, assignments, and course requirements, it was impossible to cover this within the core working time and split it over to personal time. Furthermore, she explained that mandatory and organisational training sessions usually took place during core working hours but there was no workload relief and it was an add-on to other allocated work. Inevitably work connected with workloads over-spilled into working outside contractual hours, affecting work/life balance. Reflecting on her role as a manager/supervisor, Elsie commented that she recognised the importance of social work practitioners being given space and time to undertake CPD to attain new knowledge, skills, and underpinning research, but that work pressures often meant a reluctance to prioritise this. She noted that as a manager she was aware of the impact on the team when practitioners went on training courses, especially when crises or other pressing problems arose, which inevitably "impacted on your team colleagues, especially as everyone works really closely together." This then proved a dilemma for practitioners as to whether they should take up the training programme or help out colleagues facing work pressures. Reflecting on these predicaments, participants' accounts connect to what Durkheim (1983, cited in van de Walle, 2008) described as a form of 'secondary socialisation in an occupational setting', which shapes professional identity (Wheeler, 2017). Social workers are socialised into the culture of the organisation, with individuals conforming to the norms, values, and conventions, which are often implied, rather than made explicit, and, in some instances contrast to policies, and organisational statements.

Elsie contrasted her current circumstances with the organisational opportunities available against the reality practitioners faced due to pressures. These contrasted with organisational policies and statements that maintained support for practitioners to undertake CPD, but the reality was they had high caseloads and there were staff shortages. She shared that she recognised that engaging in training would be beneficial to her professionally, but recounted that there were many occasions when, at the last minute, she had to cancel attendance at training in order to prioritise emergencies relating to children and their families' needs. Her comments reflected her personal and professional commitment to the value base of social work (PCF, Domain 2; SWE, 2019). Elsewhere in the interview she rationalised that she made a choice to work in this area of practice (Children and Families) and felt a commitment

to the families with whom she worked. She spoke about their situations that shifted from the realm of personal troubles to that of the public issues arena (Mills, 1959), which is at the forefront of the social work role and interventions.

Moving on to looking at other manager experiences, similar to Elsie, Tom conveyed that in his organisation official study leave was only permitted if the training was associated with a university qualification, such as PEPs or AMHP qualification. He went onto say he was conscious, as a manager, of the struggle many of his team supervisees experienced to undertake CPD and had tried to manage things differently:

> I wanted the team I manage to have some personal time for training and development, although the organisation does not factor this in. In supervision I tried to encourage them to factor in two hours a week and I would support them but even with my support they struggle to do this as they could not fit it in with the caseloads they have. That is really a challenge, but it is what I give to my team, but some other teams do not have this sort of opportunity, and it is not officially sanctioned.

Lara, a Pod Manager, recounted that there was a diverse range of training available in her organisation but, similarly to all other participants views, there was no built-in protected time or study leave for CPD except if the training was linked to a university programme and qualifications. In her narrative she explained:

> Our organisation has quite a transparent policy of promoting and wanting people to upskill and kind of embed their learning into practice. The only barrier to CPD is lack of time. Once you have booked the training it goes into your diary and it's up to you to prioritise it. It doesn't mean the other work goes away and it's impossible to try and manage this alongside the needs of service users, as their lives go on. At the moment, we are very busy as we are having to manage a lot of crises that we don't have time. Our cases are far too high, and we are under a lot of pressure. Over the last year, even before the pandemic, and now with the impact of it, we have less time and training is one of the things that therefore gets 'bumped off the list.'

Cath also conveyed that in her organisation there was no study leave or protected time to undertake CPD, although where staff were on a PEPs university course or other course linked to a qualification some days were allocated. However, Cath pointed out there were inequalities between the different groups of professionals she supervised regarding study leave stating:

> In my team (multi-disciplinary) for a period of time I used to manage the Educational Psychologists who were entitled to fifteen days leave each year as part of their CPD. They were very protective of their status and entitlement and used to take this time whereas all the social workers in the team did not get any leave to do their CPD. This was an inequality despite at that time we were all under the same regulatory registered body (HCPC). I (and the social workers) could never understand this, especially as we were working with the same group of service users.

Similarly, Vera, a senior social worker and supervisor, advised that normally her organisation did not give time off to undertake CPD except for courses linked to university qualifications where they were eligible to take some study leave, for instance the PEPs programme. However, she found with her workload it was not possible to take this:

> The reality is I don't have time to take it. A lot of the PEPs work has to be done outside core working hours, in my own time. Yes, we are supposed to have a certain number of days to do the study but to be perfectly honest I cannot fit it in, I just don't have time. I already work quite a lot of hours over time to get my day-to-day job done – my day cannot fit it in, there are not enough hours in the working week, unfortunately…

She added an additional tension she experienced in her role:

> We also have the pressure when it comes to reregistration when the Principal Social Work is emailing us to make sure that we have recorded our CPD and we are up to date. I think then if we asked to have some time off, we would get it but there is no work relief to allow you to manage it normally by taking time out. You end up doing casework in your town time – it is all swings and roundabouts – which one should we do? Personally, working like we are it is a struggle to fit it all in.

Vera's narrative too reminded me of Rose's (1996a) concept of 'responsibilisation' (cited in Peeters, 2019) that links with neoliberal principles, where the aim is to transfer more responsibilities to the citizen for self-care and core personal functions thereby reducing state interventions and responsibilities. It also connects to what Rose and Miller (1992) refer to as 'governing at a distance', applicable to contemporary practice. Whilst social work practitioners are self-directing and autonomous (Bondi, 2005) in many respects they are also governed by technologies that are put in place to monitor practice decisions. These surveillance and organisational cultures socialise practitioners into self-regulation to make people responsible of their own accord (Peeters, 2019).

A similar account was conveyed by Zara about lack of protected time to undertake CPD. On the other hand, she expressed confidence that if she needed some space to complete CPD her manager would be accommodating remarking:

> You don't get study time for regular CPD as this has to be done in your own time, but the training is done in core time. Whereas if you are on a university course you can get some study time…but you have to apply. I think though if I said to my manager, I needed some time to do this (CPD) I don't think it would be a problem, as she is supportive.

In addition, Adam cited a likewise position in his authority, although he had managed to negotiate study time to undertake an external course. His account is captured as follows:

> In my authority we do not have any study leave. However, when I started on my external course in Family Therapy, which was after a lot of negotiations, I was able to have some time factored in. The course was primarily from three p.m. to eight o'clock in the evening, which was a couple of hours of my working day per month but as I was also undertaking the course in my own time, I managed to get some time back to do the course work. Obviously, anything in the training book is absolutely fine, as this training is usually during the day.

Continuing, Adam then reflected on his position as a manager and how he viewed his responsibility to team members, commenting:

> In my role as a manager, I have not yet had a scenario where a social worker has said they want to go on a course and asked for time to go off to do it. I'd like to think that if I were approached, I would not say no, because it's all part of them (social worker) developing as a practitioner. By the nature of them (social worker) doing that course they are going to be able to offer something else and improve their practice, as well as other factors.

Another team manager, Stewart, spoke positively about the influence and approach adopted by Social Work England as a regulator, especially as it included being able to upload evidence of CPD onto the system at any point and amend it later if desired. He recounted:

> I've got into a pattern of using Social Work England template and putting in bullet points following training programmes. I then returning to them later and write them up more reflectively. This process enabled me to upload around ten pieces last year which I then amend later and selected what to submit.

Stewart had evidently devised a system that suited him though, continuing, he candidly said he recognised this was not possible for all social workers because of their job roles and different pressures. He conveyed his views as follows:

> I am concerned about the plight of my team members, they do not have protected time built in for CPD, and, due to large caseloads, both are barriers for social workers to focus on their personal development and CPD. Additionally, due to ongoing pressure this means there is no real space for critical reflection on practice, although there is an expectation that is part of the role.

He then went on to emphasise:

> All social workers are expected to take self-responsibility for their own learning, which is another pressure and difficult to attain.

Stewart's comments link to the neo-liberal principles to what Foucault (1977) referred to as governmentality. This explains that one of the key functions of power structures in the state and other contexts is to ardently guide and shape the individual to take on self-responsibility and links also to the regulatory function of Social Work England (2019), which requires social workers to take on self-responsibility for their CPD in order to continue practising.

A final data example for this theme from Melissa, a manager who worked part-time, also concurred with colleagues' accounts that study leave for CPD within her organisation was not factored into the working week. Her narrative aptly explains her dilemma:

> I have never been given any study leave to complete CPD: I do all my CPD in my non-work time. There is an expectation that you will do this in your own time, but I suppose if you had some time, you could do it. However, with working four days a week it is not possible even to do all the work you are given in core time, and you need to do a lot of it outside this time.

Reviewing research internationally, lack of protected time for CPD, despite it being a core requirement to continue practising as a social worker, is a finding that most organisations do not factor into practice as a right of the professional (Rentea, Lazăr, Munch, Gaba, Mihai, and Ciocănel, 2021; Ravalier, Jones, Truell, and McFadden, 2022).

Around half of the participants had attended, or were currently attending the Practice Educator's Programmes, were given three days to undertake the academic work associated with the accredited programme, but this was the exception rather than the

norm. Several participants whose organisations had built in team or group learning time to facilitate learning about implementing or working with the agency Model of Practice that was considered this a welcome step forward. Over a third of participants, primarily those working in multi-disciplinary teams of health professionals, felt there was inequality in treatment between them and colleagues, who mostly had study time built into their working week, or annually. At present protected time for CPD study is not incorporated into social work contracts countrywide. Community Care recently reported “a pull factor” when advertising social work positions (Judd, 2023) with some authorities allowing four days per year for registered social workers to undertake CPD in connection with reregistration, a development that, if more broadly adopted may begin to redress the inequalities and barriers articulated so consistently by participants in this study.

8.3 Theme: Excessive Workload/Caseloads

The data revealed one of the key determinants of social workers being able to effectively engage in CPD was the size and manageability of their caseload. As indicated above data over two-thirds (n=15) (71%) of participants indicated that their organisations did not provide them with protected study time and caseload relief was a barrier to them participating in, and having space to reflect on, their CPD learning. This finding correlates with research published by Department of Education (DfE) in their longitudinal survey of children’s social workers in 2022 that reported that 63% of social workers in this category considered their overall workloads were too high, with 65% feeling stressed by their jobs (DfE., 2023). A further survey by McFadden *et al.,* (2015) found that 84% of those working with adults with physical disabilities and 80% of those working in mental health field were emotionally exhausted leading to issues relating to their well-being.

Debra in her narrative highlighted the predicament faced by practitioners when booked onto attending CPD training courses or activities when they were overburdened with work. She spoke about the dilemmas in terms of “shall I go on training, or shall I do my other pressing work?” She shared the contentious decision, remarking:

> ….I have been there myself where I’ve had a really full caseload and I have a training course and I think, I don’t want to go on training today, I just want to get on top of my work and get up to date, but you’ve kind of got to go, especially if

> it is a mandatory course. I haven't been in this position recently, but worry due to the past experiences and what I see of others going through…It can be quite difficult when you have a lot on your plate and so are too busy to do the CPD…

She went onto add:

> One other thing though is you don't have time to reflect and grow in your role as there is this and that, that must be done. You don't have time to do that (Reflection) at all…

As previously mentioned, critical reflection on practice issues, especially drawing on the work of Schön (1983, 1987) and Freire (1970), is core building up knowledge, application and expertism, as well as enhancing personal growth and competence.

Three participants, Sara, Lara, and Naomi gave similar examples of high caseloads and how these were barriers to undertaking CPD opportunities. For instance, Sara, a senior social worker, and staff supervisor, commented:

> Going back to your previous questions one of the biggest problems we have are our high caseloads. If we go on a training course, even if it is a day's training course, that work does not get done. The reality is we do that in our evenings and weekends, so the time might be made for us to be allowed to go out of the workplace to attend training, but in reality, nothing changes on your caseload in the workplace, and you still have to do that work. It is all about juggling all of that, no one wants to take on your duties, and the way things are you've not got the capacity to really take up opportunities that might be available…you can train whenever you want, but you have to manage it alongside your other work. I am doing PEPs and was meant to be allocated time to do it and evidence my CPD. Thus, my time now is squeezed and squeezed, so I have to work outside my core time to keep up with it.

Likewise, Lara, a Pod Manager, spoke of similar work pressures of managing her own role as a manager, but also having overall responsibility for the team workload, expressing this as follows:

> You have the ability to book on to training, it's in your diary but you then need to prioritise it, but it doesn't mean other work goes away. Families' lives continue to go on and at the moment we've got our cases too high and we are under a lot of pressure and because of this pressure training is the one thing that gets cancelled whenever there is a family crisis going on... At the moment I have 140 cases to oversee in my team…

Lack of time and space was also a factor highlighted by Naomi, who is currently a team for social workers in a hospital setting. In her narrative she highlighted the pressurised environment in which she practised:

> In our role we do not have any protected time for CPD, and over the years our social work team has been diminished; we currently now only have four full time members of staff due to recruitment and vacancies. Actually, we have a total caseload of around nine hundred people between us who should be having their needs assessed and reviewed. We also have a lot of safeguarding assessments to do, as well as all the legal requirements to manage. We can go on training courses but with all this at the top of my mind all the time it is difficult to focus on training. Apart from keeping my Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) work recording and portfolio up to date it is difficult to focus on going on training and CPD regularly. There are so many plates to juggle aren't there? So, it is always all up in the air.

In the same way as many of the participants' narratives Elsa emphasised that within her organisation there was no shortage of opportunities. However, to engage and benefit it was necessary to have personal time and space free from pressures and commitments inherent in current practice, explaining:

> The pressures of work stresses, as well as lack of resources, limits what kind of things workers are able to engage with. There are kind of loads of opportunities out there, but you need to get other stuff sorted out before you can engage in CPD. I know of lots of examples of colleagues who are booked to go on training and then there is a work family crisis and they cannot go…They say I cannot do this today because I have this crisis even though it is very important for their development.

Expanding of this view, Elsa went onto emphasise that integrity, ethics, and values (PCF Domain 2, 2018; SWE,1919) did not only apply only to social work practise with service uses but also applied when supporting and caring for colleagues at times they were under pressure, though this largely went unrecognised. Recounting her perspective:

> Within social work there is a lot of altruism, people put behind them their own views, feelings, and needs. It is not the way social workers are portrayed in lots of things (e.g., media) and what people (social workers) are saying is not acknowledged.

Interpreting the findings together, the situation participants describe is consistent with the issues identified earlier in relation to lack of protected time for training and development as part of a professional package and represents a barrier to participation. Some participants indicated that there was no shortage of opportunities, including online learning in their organisation, but they lacked the time and space to free themselves to engage. Their accounts correlate with research published by the Department for Education (2022) and Ravalier, McFadden, Boichat, Clabburn, and

Moriarty (2021), which found that stressors such as large caseloads, increased bureaucracy, and inadequate supervision were factors that affected social workers, particularly in terms of burnout (McFadden, 2015b), and acted as 'push factors' that could lead to staff leaving the profession. Analysing this situation from Fromm's perspective, it links to the ideas of having, by submission and deference to hierarchy orders, whereas the aim is to reach the being mode through opportunities to undertake more of a therapeutic focus in practice, one which encourages self-awareness and self-growth (Fromm, 1976).

The two themes, lack of protected time and excessive workloads are closely interlinked. When considered singularly, each is an individual barrier, cumulatively, however, they present significant barriers to professional development and to being able to access opportunities to achieve professional expertise.

8.4 Theme: Lack of Headspace/Brain Space/Mind Space

Over a third of participants (n=8) (38%) mentioned interchangeable/connected themes such as Headspace, Brain Space or Mind Space specifically as important states of mind necessary to be able to focus and engage in CPD opportunities to develop new knowledge and skills. Contemporary social work practice results in social workers' minds having to deal with an array of complex information presented by service-users, colleagues, or other agencies. This requires headspace to unravel issues buzzing around in their minds, which often becomes 'information overload.' Additionally, there are administrative systems and technological challenges to oversee. To manage these different areas is not straightforward but multiplex especially drawing on the array of knowledge and skills to function smoothly. The data below draws out the different terminology used by participants to highlight a range of factors that are entwined and are barriers to effectively having the mindset to engage in CPD. The language used in the data by participants uses different terminologies to explain how their psychological states are affected.

Elsie, an assistant team manager in a Children and Families Team, when reflecting on the challenges and changes in practice highlighted various barriers she had encountered, especially being able to consistently focus and wholeheartedly engage when she had booked onto CPD training course. Responding confidently, and spontaneously, she said "brain space" then continuing with her narrative:

> Like our brains are so full of so much stuff. Yes, and its live stuff you know, its real stuff, it's families and what's happening for them. It's not theories based on a model that they've looked at on a chart in a spreadsheet in the training, it is real stuff. And it is very difficult you know for them (social workers) to then put down the "live stuff to prioritise the theory stuff." Yes, they're like, well what am I going to do with this, like how is this going to change anything? On that day when they've got a million of other pressures to prioritise and then that…

Elsie then went onto cite examples of social workers who when faced with this dilemma took a decision to prioritised responding to the family's situation rather than attending the booked CPD course. Expanding further, Elsie went onto contrast this type of experience with her positive experience of attending a three-day residential management course that had been commissioned and paid for by the Department of Education (DfE). Elsie asserted "she was lucky to be given a place" before outlining the benefits:

> Actually, being able to absorb material is important you know, which is why the training that I did on the residential stay was so different as it forces you to stop working and it forces you to engage in what they're teaching you. You know it's not even what they're teaching you, it forces you to engage in the setting and what's being offered. You know I've been in training before and if I've got my phone with me, I'm responding to emails and I'm kind of under the table trying to do it, you know doing it sneakily.

Elsie went onto explain further that when attending a residential course, with no access to a laptop or mobile phone you had a clearer mind and were able to engage. She spoke of the positiveness of having time and space when she was able to 'discover' what type of manager she wanted to be, how she could achieve these attributes and what helped her to be successful, an area Freire (1970) would describe as achieving emancipation and engaging with a 'being' mode of learning as promulgated by Fromm (1976). This is where the learner is fully present and can make deeper connection with the experience of being exposed to and assimilating new understandings.

Another participant Lucy also spoke of the benefits and positive impact of time and space away from the workplace to attend a five-day residential course on a family-finding model for children and young people who had spent a long time in the care system. She described it as "really inspirational," and having "created a shift in thinking." Importantly, it also offered her the "time and headspace" to engage with the learning on offer, describing this:

> … it was very intense…. It is now very much part of our team development, and we apply it to reunification, with some really positive outcomes with children who have had previous multiple breakdowns...

The scenarios of two participants, and, additionally Cassie, all identified the importance of having time, space, and importantly 'mind space' to engage in CPD learning in a meaningful way and the positive benefit to their practice. This also was raised by Melissa as one of the factors in her narrative:

> To do CPD you have actually got to be able to take the time and enjoy doing it. You might though have so much gone on in your head that you just don't have the headspace to be able to engage and focus on the learning. And it effects being able to reflect on it and how it relates to your work and learning.

Likewise, Lara posited a related example of the time commitment of attending CPD training and the way other areas also impacted on learning, asserting:

> I was just on the restorative practice training and it's five mornings, but I still had to carry on and do my work. I think that what's difficult is having a bit of headspace to really engage with the training that's on offer.

Similarly to other participants, Stewart also commented that his organisation did not have protected time for CPD. However, he went onto point out the importance for him was having personal space to engage in any learning, remarking:

> …to have one day a month for your CPD would be fine but I think it's more important, or just as important, to be able to get into a mindset and see this (CPD) as a learning opportunity.

Whereas whilst Elsa emphasised the importance of having 'brain space' to effectively engage in CPD, she also pointed out there were also a multitude of reasons that impacted on social workers and could be counterproductive to engaging in learning drawing attention to the following areas:

> The way that social workers are portrayed in a lot of things it's not like that here. A lot of time people are saying 'I can't do that training today,' even though it is important to their development. This is because they have a work crisis and cannot go. There is a lot of altruism in social work, but they (social workers) don't say that. They put their own feelings and needs behind what is going on and deal with the crisis. You can't go on training if you haven't got the brain space. It is also about resources and stresses that are major things that need sorting out first, as well as an acknowledgement that a lot of people are saying this. Personally, I am the type of person who would prefer to sort things out myself and see what is happening with the young person rather than get

> someone else to see them. On balance it is a bit of a push /pull thing and not balanced when it comes to training.

In the final selection of fragments of data relating to this topic Cath referred to the Covid 19 Pandemic which had necessitated shifting from face-to-face to on-line interviews with service users, as well as virtual learning CPD courses and how this had impacted on her and her team. To effectively navigate this, she disclosed she was trying to build in positive team learning opportunities which she shared below:

> There are so many things that have affected CPD, especially IT and shift to virtual learning. The world has been affected by Covid 19, and you almost have to learn and relearn your day job. In my team we are just getting back to CPD and trying to cover a different theme in Team Meetings, for instance posing the question what is happening to us as workers? What are the effects of COVID 19 on practice? People just didn't have the headspace for learning early on as there is so much going on. We had to focus on learning so much about the skills to undertake virtual interviewing and all that, which took quite a lot of time for everyone to get used to it and be able to put into practice.

Researchers at the University of Kent who monitored a group of individuals, found excessive use of tech, such as smartphones, computers, etc., gadgets, and increased noise from equipment can increase stress, and affects natural space, leading to anxiety (cited by www.headspace.com) This research correlates with findings from participants who reported they experienced persistent problems particularly when working from home during Covid. Findings reported constant interruptions from pinging emails coming in, mobile phones buzzing with messages, as well as interruptions due to family or environmental issues. Dealing with these extraneous problems required the ability to multi-tasking that became stressful especially not being able to engage and focus on working with service users' issues.

Drawing the findings together, a third of participants specifically referred to the importance of being in the right state of mind psychologically to be able to focus and engage with CPD learning and attend sessions. They described their mind in terminology such as needing "Headspace, Brain Space or Mind Space." When discussing barriers to being able to concentrate on learning they expressively spoke of being "overstretched" and "overloaded," which negatively affected their minds' ability to engage in learning in the workplace, or have the space to critically reflect on practice, plan, or think. Their narratives correlate with research on brain-based learning by Harden and Jones (2022), which indicated that "emotional stress,

including stress related to the academic setting, affects students' ability to learn new information and assimilate knowledge" (p.152). This also resonates with contemporary research by Ravalier, *et al.,* (2021), reinforcing the conclusion that without protected workspace and psychological capacity, the formal availability of CPD opportunities cannot translate into meaningful learning or developmental gain.

8.5 Theme: Lack of Expertise Teaching on Internal Courses

The majority of participants' (n=19) (90%) considered their employers or organisations provided a good basic range of CPD topics. These were almost exclusively provided internally, with limited access to external courses, due to financial constraints and organisation agenda. The range, for example, had a high focus on organisational induction programmes (e.g., recording, safeguarding, protocols, policies), as well as law and legal framework, implementation of new statutory polices. Additionally, social issues (e.g., Substance Misuse, Domestic Abuse, Anti-Discrimination, Diversity) or implementation of new initiatives, such as agency selected practice models e.g. Signs of Safety, Strength's Approach. CPD areas were primarily delivered internally by in-house selected employees, some of whom were internally accredited trainers. Others were external trainers brought into present/teach on a specific subject where they were generally experts (e.g. Trauma Therapy, Neglect, Models of Practice, Signs of Safety, Strengths' Approach). These latter presenters were positively viewed and a welcomed move by participants.

Notwithstanding the above, research findings from nearly half of the participants (n=9) (43%) considered that the content, level, and expert knowledge provided by the majority of internal courses presenters were at quite a basic level and more in keeping with participant attendees who were at the inexperienced stage of their social worker career. Narratives of participants revealed that many presenters did not provide the expert knowledge and skills that practitioners required or expected. This is a higher percentage than the YouGov Survey (2021) that indicated that 26% of those surveyed felt that CPD available was not appropriate to participants stages of development. Findings indicated that participants had enquiring minds, with a desire to strengthen their knowledge and skills that they would require as they moved through their career journey to gain expert status whether they practised in Children and Family or Adult Services. For instance, areas identified by practitioners were courses in education and training to enable them to move more seamlessly to more

senior positions (e.g., Experienced Social Worker that had a supervisory role, Advanced Social Work Practitioner or Strategic Social Worker, see BASW PCF, 2018) for social worker career journey). Or, for example, higher knowledge of safeguarding/risk assessments, more research and theory to demonstrate evidence-based practice or pass on through their supervisory/mentoring roles.

The lack of access to external courses has also, over the years, been compounded by austerity (BASW, 2017), that led to local authority budgets being cut, and a higher demand for social work services. This situation has been further exacerbated due to Covid 19 pandemic when training opportunities were disrupted and initially placed on hold until organisations had developed the knowledge and skills to shift sessions on-line. Some participants mentioned there was a lengthy gap before their organisation facilitated CPD through on-line courses; others confided they initially struggled with use of IT and had to familiarise themselves with new approaches. However, most participants indicated that once they became more familiar and confident accessing on-line courses independently, they were able to engage and move on independently using their newly acquired skills to access knowledge, thus demonstrating professional curiosity and creativity in their practice. This gave them access to a wide range of on-line, virtual teaching and resources to build on their knowledge, skills, and interests to meet their own professional needs and, importantly those of the service users with whom they work. The approach opened new learning opportunities and experiences to gain expertism in a variety of areas, as well as reduced isolation. Table 2 (Appendix 17, p.354) identifies the wide range of CPD learning opportunities realised by participants.

As highlighted above participants, across different organisations, raised concern about their organisation's internal trainers. They considered that they lacked expertise in the subject they were delivering and this was a barrier to participants' opportunity to develop expertism around a particular area of practice or knowledge base they required to effectively practise. Achieving expert knowledge to interweave into their practice was a common aspiration of the majority of participants.

For instance, Adam's comments regarding lack of expertism of trainers was not untypical:

> I find myself looking at the training brochure and if I see it is an external person I am more likely to sign up, especially if it sparks my interest and especially if it is important to my role. The internal trainers are usually the 'Train the Trainer type'…they are quite basic and sometimes the people have been 'roped into it,' rather than actually being passionate about the area or an expert with a lot to share around the subject. In my experience the external people have a waiting list as the places go quite quickly…

Talking in a similar frame, Melissa shared her views about having external presenters and the benefit to her practice.

> Most of our training is internal by internal presenters but our authority sources some external trainers. I like to attend these (external) as the presenters are always up to date, especially with recent case law and how it applies to adult assessments. They also bring with them a lot of relevant new information…and we also get up to date legal training and information about the changes when we also have an external trainer.

Whereas Stewart, with considerable experience, commented:

> In terms of learning opportunities, I would make one or two points. Formal learning opportunities for more experienced social worker tend to decrease and you have to start looking further afield, outside the agency…you have to become more inventive yourself, and look for these, but I am a firm believer in that actually…

Vera gave a related account:

> …It seems to primarily be promoting development early on in social workers' careers to help they get more skilled…. in terms of staff who've been around for longer there is not much on offer apart from the normal mandatory stuff…

Findings revealed that lack of opportunity to attend more advanced training in order to attain expertise and advance in their area of practice was one experienced by a number of participants, with evidence of this trend extending across different local authority areas. This was noted in Chapter 7 by Lucy who had formally raised it with her organisation:

> I have raised in my organisation is that there is a lack of advanced safeguarding training or refresher training at a higher level…it is pitched at the wrong level for an experienced practitioner…there needs to be more opportunities to advance and develop your skills, or have some special development for teams…

This situation indicates a poverty of ambition by organisations. No participant mentioned CPD courses to help them evaluate research findings, or to become more research-minded social scientist as recommended in the report by Professor

Croisdale-Appleby (2014, p.15). Although somewhat dated, Chris Jones in 1996 raised concern about the anti-intellectualism that was affecting social work courses, describing this as “theoretical stripping out of the social work curriculum” (1996, p.191). This has had repercussions for social work education ever since, especially the coverage of theory; it has been further raised by other writers, such as Singh and Cowden (2009), whereas Narey (2014) considered that in social work education there was too much theory, and insufficient practical application but overall had little coverage or debate. Notably, a student writing in *Community Care* (2017) spoke perturbingly about her practice learning placement where she encountered anti-intellectualism where “theoretical thinking was seen as university snobbery and encouraged to replace it with common-sense approach to social work” (Shah, 2017). Although these articles are in the past, political and media campaigns continue to oppose the raising of important social justice issues (e.g., racial, social, and discriminatory issues), these being seen as “wokery,” which is used as a derogatory term.

A further area raised in the findings by over half of participants related to personal agency and autonomy over the type and content of CPD training available, for instance, Tom observed:

> … CPD is not individually led, it’s organisationally led training…the training we get is making sure that we work in accordance with the policies and guidance of the local authority…the organisation does invest but there is a difference in investing and having the right resources to support practitioners so that they can use the resources to develop themselves…so that is the challenge currently on the ground.

Adding similar reasons, Sara and Adam spoke of social workers being encouraged by their organisation to identify topics they wanted to cover to enable them to undertake their roles, but these were not provided. Sara’s comments below encapsulate her views:

> There is a gap in terms of topics that are on offer by my organisation as they ask us what type of training opportunities we need, but they do not listen to us although we do have practice consultants, and they now do a lot of the training. Consequently, we now have less external training providers offering the training that we have identified we need.

In Adam's narrative, he raised his and colleagues' disappointment that specific training identified by himself and others as necessary for their practice development was not provided. He shared the subsequent action he has taken as a manager to provide his team with alternative opportunities:

> Really CPD is led by the organisation, rather than the social workers. An example is that I can think of is many times when we've been encouraged to talk about our training needs as a team, which we pass up to training and then the training book comes out there is not one thing in there we've identified. People then become so disillusioned and then I guess that's for me now as a manager to raise and I now kind of focus on team development. I thought okay, what can we do, even if it is just a little thing as a team to help ourselves and to be able to fulfil some of our training needs, so that is what we now do and build into our team practise.

The various narratives given above by participants correlate with some of the findings of Stan's (2018) research whose participants reported that their training was selected by specialist consultants. This left social worker participants feeling they were being treated by their employers as 'passive agents' whereas their views contrasted to those participants employed by Non-government Agencies (NGOs) whose employers encouraged their staff to become more involved and active over choice of CPD. Overall, data suggests that the social workers' role and environment have, as Mills (1959) describes been 'deprofessionalised', giving them less autonomy within their role and decision-making, with a loss of individuality and requiring them to adapt to bureaucratic demands (Dominelli,1996).

However, findings from discussions with two independent self-employed participants (n=2) (9.5%) contrast with the aforementioned perspectives as that they considered they had personal choice and autonomy regarding CPD training opportunities. Although they had to personally pay for training, and encountered unpaid time off work, they had built up a network where they were able to access a range of CPD training through professional organisations, universities, or peer group networks. They considered that through choice and accessing courses relevant to their practice and personal interests they were up to date with contemporary practice issues. For instance, Jessi's comments' frame this:

> I am now in a position where I choose exactly what training I want to do, whereas previously I would take up everything whereas I am now more selective. Training is extremely expensive, especially day conferences, but I also attend

> my professional association training courses, which are more reasonable. Being self-employed means that it is your responsibility, but it also means that you have more choice over what you do for CPD.

As indicated in these accounts independent practitioners have an element of choice over what they undertake for CPD and plan their career. However, despite this they are still shaped by the neoliberal principles inherent in society and take on responsibilisation for self-development (Rose, 1996a, cited in Peeters, 2019).

Dave, who specialises in practice education and childcare consultancy, recounted that he too was more selective about his CPD training. He also mentioned that since austerity impacted on local authorities and universities, followed by Covid pandemic, there were less opportunities for face-to-face attendance at courses. However, he too attended his professional association programmes, their network meetings and on-line courses that enabled him to access CPD from a range of community and specialist sources.

In summary, lack of presenters' expertism in subject teaching, was an area that was specifically the focus of more experienced social workers. Research has found that lack of expertise in learning has been found to be a key barrier to learning that has restricted opportunities (Billet, 1995, cited in Lloyd, *et al.,* 2014). This finding, as well as control by organisational management over the choice of topics, were frequently mentioned by participants, as were lack of opportunity to attend external courses and broaden their knowledge and expertism. This situation was due to organisational financial constraints, which had also been exacerbated by austerity measures. A YouGov (2021) survey relating to England indicated that 28% of participants reported that funding for courses was not available. This finding is not dissimilar to social work research in other countries. For instance, in Romania, Rentea, *et al.,* (2021) found that financial constraints were also a factor affecting social workers being funded for external training courses, which appears to correlate with what has been happening during the period of austerity.

The findings echo the YouGov (2021) survey, which found that a number of social worker participants expressed dissatisfaction with the formal in-house training they had undertaken, with this being more prevalent in participants with over ten years' experience. It was unclear whether the comments applied to internal trainers or presenters though concerningly comments raised included terms such as "poor

quality trainers or speakers", "too theoretical and not practical enough", "outdated content", and "repetitive" (YouGov, 2021,p.29) – indicating that in many organisations CPD was not meeting the needs of participants but appeared perfunctory, similar to what Freire (1970) would call banking model of education. If provision is poor, practitioners will disengage, so it is incumbent on organisations to provide good, quality, relevant programmes that recognise the developmental trajectory of experienced practitioners and equip them to gain genuine expertism in their fields of practice.

8.6 Theme: Lack of Education and Training Opportunities for Transition to Management Roles

A reoccurring finding, and important theme identified in interviews with participants, indicated that just over a half (n=11) (52%) identified that they had no specific training in management when they moved from basic grade social workers onto supervisory and management roles. A number of participants spoke about the distinct functions and responsibilities that they took on in this transition, particularly highlighting issues around monitoring of work, audit, assessing to fitness to practice, and authority inherent in the role. To counter this deficit, many participants mentioned that they were directed to e-learning and organisation's intranet, which had information and some modules relevant to their roles. Overall, there seemed to be a feeling that they were expected to 'learn on the job.' Notwithstanding, some were able to draw on their experiences of being a Practice Educator, others found guidance through on-line management training courses, with a minority being able to access courses run internally by their organisations (applicable to all management employees). Others disclosed that later in their management roles they were able to access a specific course that had been commissioned by the Department of Education (DfE) and developed and facilitated by Research in Practice in conjunction with various other academic providers (e.g., Practice Supervisor Development Programme for Supervisors (PSDP). This programme was specifically for those managers working in Children and Families, though others in adult services mentioned accessing their organisations' generic management training that had become available but no specific similar provision.

Adam shared his experience:

> There certainly wasn't anything when I first started (in management), but over time I have been on a number of short one- or two-day courses on management issues but these was council wide training, not specific to social workers…it is important to learn social work stuff, so there is a bit of a gap. Recently, in my new role, I have been offered a course that is an official type of management programme, and I think I'll get some sort of certificate or something, but it is not a formal qualification though.

A similar view was conveyed by Lucy:

> When I first became a manager, I did not have any pre-training, I just moved there the next week. The side of management I found where there was less support was on the Human Resources side, like staff development, sickness, staff improvement and all those sorts of things. We were just expected to get on with it and deal with it so that was quite a challenge. Now recently I have been on some corporate management development training in my organisation. This was helpful as there were small groups where we were able to look at different models of supervision and some of the challenges we faced but I still need more developmental opportunities… I did ask if I could go on a post-graduate course but all I was offered was a level 3 apprenticeship and whilst this is something I don't think it is at the level that I need to do my job.

Talking in a similar frame, Vera conveyed her experience:

> I hadn't undertaken any training or management courses before I started supervising staff; it was just a new job; you had to get on with it. There was this whole book on management, but no one went through it with you. Since, I have undertaken some student supervision training for one day, and a half-day session on appraising supervisees. I have been doing this job for three years, but I don't feel as confident with all the areas that I would like to be. I have had to base it on my own experience of how I have been supervised and what I thought was good and bad supervision and how I have interpreted it…I think that my supervisees and supervisors are happy with the supervision I am giving as I haven't had any complaints, but I still personally think I have not had sufficient training in my role as a supervisor.

Although Melissa shared a similar experience in the interim, she had found an alternative that has enabled her to draw on the course content and relevance by undertaking the Practice Educator Programme (PEPs) to develop supervisory skills conveying this as follows:

> When I moved into management, I had no formal training to take on the role, so it was learning on the job. I am now doing a PEPs programme, which is very helpful and I'm learning a lot about supervision. More recently our organisation has invested in management training and have a vision for managers. Once I have finished the PEPs courses I'll sign up. However, it is not compulsory for managers to do it, but I would like the chance to do it but don't think it is a good idea to do the two together.

Tom, in his narrative, also spoke about his organisation recognising the importance of the importance of providing management opportunities but this was generic and on-line, rather than providing bespoke programmes for social work management:

> For those in management wanting to be managers there are some bite size trainings on-line, but they are for all the organisations' employees…there are no organised courses for those in management roles specifically working in social workers in my organisation. Now most training opportunities in the organisation are for apprenticeships, and these are being used as an opportunity for health and social care workers to train as social workers…

In the following account, Cassie talks quite poignantly about her own move into management and how her experience and feedback of being supervised impacted on her and affected her confidence:

> When I started in my role as an assistant team manager it meant that I moved on to be a supervisor for half of the team members, but I was not given any training beforehand, so it was learning on the job. I had a manager who was lovely, but she was from a different cultural background, very straight talking and didn't take any prisoners. At our first session she said, 'You're not very experienced and there are a lot of things that you will need in the Assistant Team Manager (ATM) role, and you haven't got them and you're very young". It started from there, with her starting off each session saying what I had not done well and then she would move onto what went well. Well, my confidence was at rock bottom, but despite this I learnt a lot under her style of management, which was quite well, harsh, but I did grow and develop…I have now had the chance recently to go on the Practice Supervisor Development Programme for supervisors (PSDP) (Research in Practice, *et al.,* 2022) (RiP), and it was really good and interesting. We spent a lot of time learning about different styles of management, practising skills, learning motivational interviewing and the 'Golden Thread of Management in Social Care.' It gave me time to look across the main landscape of supervision and gain knowledge and skills as a supervisor and supervisory skills.

Cassie, and a number of other participants who had been on this specialist external training, spoke very positively about the benefit of being part of a group of supervisors from different organisations across a defined region - and the peer support and opportunity for learning from experts that it provided, which enabled participants to develop a 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger,1991), with ongoing networking and sharing of practice issues.

However, on a positive note, a small minority (n=4) (19%), mentioned that when they transitioned to a management role their organisation had provided them with opportunities to develop supervisory and management roles. For instance, Seb, spoke decisively about his experience, which contrasted with the majority of participants' views:

> When I became a senior practitioner, they (LA) sent me an email and said that these are the courses available to you. I was enrolled in a management course, which helped equip me with some of the skills I have developed in this area. The whole thing depends on the local authority. In mine we have workforce development team that's very proactive and as I have progressed in management, they have advised me what is available, some on-line and encouraged me to sign up, which I did.

Similarly, a participant with other thirty years' experience Stewart, commented:

> I was fortunate as I did a certificate in management studies some years ago, as well as had substantive other bits of training. I must admit though in terms of formal academic training it has trailed off in the last few years, but I am still keen to increase my knowledge base and develop areas of my practice.

Likewise, Cath, whilst not having such a positive experience had management opportunities woven into her CPD experience that have been beneficial to her role and practice:

> When I started in management, some 12 years or so ago, there were not any training programmes. However, I did get to go on one later, a level 4/5 but it was a generic one run by the authority and was very driven by the business model which was really not for social workers. Although I finished the programme I didn't do the Diploma essays, as it was difficult then as I am dyslexic and there were no acknowledgement or resources available to me then. However, later on though I managed to do other bits and pieces on management skills' courses and build these up. I was then appointed to the role as Quality Assurance, and this really helped me develop a wealth of knowledge and skills which I have been able to transfer to my different management roles.

Milli conveying that she had had the opportunity of attending a short course for those transferring to management roles run by the local authority corporate department. This focused primarily on roles associated with human resource functions, which she found helpful. However, it lacked the specifics of the complexity of supervising and managing a team in social work, with the many strands to the role.

Drawing the data together, there was no formal route or structure in place when transitioning from basic grade, but experienced, social worker, to the leadership role as supervisor, often a senior social worker, which was the first rung of the management structure in an organisation. With few exceptions noted above, newly appointed supervisors were expected to 'learn on the job' and access any 'online' resources made available by their organisation. A minority of participants' organisations provided a structured online route or access to a leadership programme. The role of supervisor is complex and has many functions from supporting ad developing supervisees' knowledge, skills, advice, and decision-making, as well as being responsible for a range of human resource areas which are pivotal in terms of the supervisee's employment status and career. It is important, therefore, that supervisors gain access to CPD to enhance and develop the key qualities and skills they require to effectively function in their roles. It is also important that supervisees receive quality supervision, as poor supervision, high caseloads, and increasing bureaucracy (Ravalier, 2017*;* Welander, Astvik, and Isaksson,2019) have all been associated with social workers experiencing burnout (McFadden, Campbell and Taylor, 2015) and affect retention.

However, on a positive note, as indicated by some of the participants interviewed, they had been able to access a new time-limited DfE initiative and reported on the positive benefit this has been to their practice and roles. These are areas that need to be addressed to overcome long-term serious recruitment and retention concerns in children and families and adult services, which appear to be also a problem of concern internationally, as noted in research by Cook, Carder, Blake-Homes, and Yussif (2024). Media reports (Judd, 2023) indicate that some organisations in England are developing more structured career plans and integrating these into terms and conditions of social work practitioners. However, it is of concern that, in comparison to many other professions in health and care, there is no overall requirement for government organisations to provide this, despite the role being almost state employed/controlled function.

Participants' narratives in this study were clear that barriers existed when transitioning to a new role, for example management, a move to seniority, or a specialism. Participants considered these transitions needed to have in pace training and development to ensure familiarisation into the roles, rather than learning on the job and a state of uncertainty. Several participants expressed

concern about the responsibility and anxiety they felt when they took on a management role without any indication. They felt ill-equipped, deficient in knowledge, and subject to surveillance, and, although their role was powerful and involved surveillance of others, this links to Foucault's metaphor of the Panopticon, where their performance was being judged by others, and which also had a psychological impact on them: a reversal of roles (Foucault,1977).

8.7 Theme 6: Lack of Career Development Embedded into Organisational Culture

Moving onto organisational functions, personal and career development were core themes often raised spontaneously in interviews by three quarters (n=16) (76%) of participants. As previously indicated data findings revealed that organisations provided mandatory and statutory updating training opportunities and a range of other learning/development opportunities though not all this was accessible to all staff, which led to some grievances. Findings indicated that participants saw CPD as a vehicle to increasing their knowledge and skills but also pivotal to their career journey. A number of participants voiced their disappointment that there were no organisational structure or pathways to advancing their careers that were accessible to them. Data revealed that often career development and options were raised within supervision or at annual appraisals, but these were on an impromptu level, and, any planning, or action, primarily shifted to being a self-responsibility.

One participant, Lucy, had undertaken some research on the position of international social workers and learnt that in other countries social workers undertook advanced training across a range of areas, such as family therapists, cognitive behavioural therapists, and such like, enabling them to become highly skilled practitioners. Her narrative exemplifies her journey within social work when trying to advance her career:

> When I first left university I worked in adult services, there was a sort of induction training and a lot of me having to learn independently as well as lots of one day courses such as DOLs, Mental Capacity Act and they were all new to me. When I moved to Children's Services, again there was an induction and lots of short courses on specific areas plus the then the agency model, Signs of Safety. I didn't get any real professional development until I got on the PEPs courses, which is something I had to push for…I want to do a master's in research but there is no funding for this or funding to do any advanced practice courses to

> work with children and families, such as Trauma informed practice, or family therapy…I have raised in my organisation about lack of advanced courses but so far, I have not seen anything and to move on it all has to be self-initiated.

It was evident from this discussion, and others, that Lucy was eager to increase her development and opportunities, with her ambition linking to the recommendations put forth by Professor Croisdale-Appleby in his review on Revisioning Social Work Education (2014).

Similarly, Vera describes how she considered her career has been forestalled by lack of organisational structure:

> Having been around for a few years, I think you get to the point that you've seen all the stuff they do for CPD as you have done it but if there is something that comes up that is interesting, I'll do a training course…many things I have done before and there is nothing for advanced practitioners…In terms of career development beyond where I am in my current job there is not a huge amount of availability, individual autonomy, or organisational plan.. I am now doing the PEPs course, which I selected myself and managed to get a place…

Two participants, Cassie and Stewart pointed out that with no career programme in place in their authority, the onus for career development had to be self-initiated, which both took on board. Cassie encapsulated her perspective in the following narrative:

> CPD to me is in two parts… CPD that is mandatory, for organisation and regulatory requirements of Social Work England and their expectations…but what I've always thought of as CPD is that it is something for you, it's about your personal development, your career. It's important to keep research and training up so you're up to date with everything …there is the quantity thing that I have to do, and then the part where I want to do it because I am interested in it and want to progress and that all has to be self-initiated, as there is no career structure in place.

With Stewart emphasising:

> For me it is going back to this sort of personal learning. I think I mentioned the action learning sets, which is very much people coming together and sharing ideas, which I use. What I have picked up on my social worker journey is that you have to take responsibility for your own learning as there have been no overall career structures in the organisations in which I have worked.

The following narratives from Tom and Seb illustrate that with the absence of a career structure being in place in their authorities that they had evaluated this and had set in place clear plans to advance in their careers. Tom shared his approach:

> Undertaking CPD for me is two pronged, one to develop myself so that I can support people (service users) and colleagues, and other is to advance my career. I discuss my career plans in my annual appraisals, but I have taken my own initiative to map out my personal development plan and having an action plan in place to support myself and my career advancement – it all has to be self-initiated…The local authority has some good very good materials on line but it still boils down to the fact that time is a factor and personally when it comes to personal development, individual sacrifices need to be made…there is no funding for advanced courses, it is not an area that local authorities invest in…So the buck stops there in terms of personal and professional development…

Similarly, Seb spoke positively about using CPD as a building block for personal and professional development, but this needed to be underpinned by using himself as a resource by being proactive and taking self-responsibility:

> CPD has contributed positively to my practice; it has helped me to develop in my career from being a social worker, to be a senior social worker, to be the deputy manager and employee aspiring to be a manager. Without CPD obviously my progression, professional and personal development in this sphere would have been very limited. It has really put me in a better position …So, I would recommend to anybody who wants to excel in any profession to take up CPD. Though it has to be self-responsibility and you need to be proactive in whatever profession you are in as there is no overall career structure in my authority.

In her narrative Elsie spoke with passion about the underlying reasons, and importance to develop her career but with the realism about her situation and the personal cost her choice engendered:

> Career development has to be self-responsibility though ideally it would happen in the organisation, but local authorities are too busy, fast pace and other pressures and it is not going to happen. Learning is a forever moving feast but being self-reliant has got me to thus far in my career and I am kind of consolidating. When I want to move on, or if some other role interests me, I will create a new action plan for myself and work towards getting the competencies I need to move on. Pursing your dreams, learning more about it and what you want from your career is an individualised kind of desire and, as social workers, we want to be the best at we can be at what we do. It isn't a smooth route, but it is down to individuals' self-determination and your own push to get there…

Reflecting on the narratives of participants Vera, Cassie, Stewart, Tom, Seb, and Elsie, their accounts these highlight how they have been socialised and shaped by the principles of advanced liberalism - what Foucault (1977) refers to as

governmentality. It is evident that all participants have exercising responsibilisation through their active self-governance.

One participant, Sara, described poignantly how she was subjected to unfair treatment by her local authority, as well as inequalities in career opportunities for different departments within the same local authority. She spoke pessimistically about the problems of local authority's not having an open career structure fairly applied to all employees:

> Our authority doesn't have a specific career structure which is a disadvantage in relation to other departments in the authority…I have a close friend who works for the Highway Department and within a year of being there she was got an agreement with them to pay for her to do a master's in environmental studies… … think it is about valuing staff really…probably one of the biggest deficits is that there isn't really any step up to the management structure…

Whilst Zara's local authority did not have any career programme in place, she was positive about the various opportunities she had been given by her authority to date. However, with a shift by the authority to an Academy for recruitment and training she worried that this would limit opportunities in future which she highlights in her narrative:

> We don't have a structured career programme in our authority, though overall, I have had positive experiences, rather than negative. The worry though I have is I want to be a Practice Teacher, but I was not able to go on the PEPs course this year and now our authority has opened an Academy. They have their own Practice Educators, so I am unsure of whether I am going to get that opportunity. I do think though that you have to find things on your own initiative and not only take what is on offer. I have found it is important to be proactive, and I will bring things up in my supervision and appraisal and say I am interested in doing this or that. I think I have been quite fortunate in my authority as I have a very supportive, interested manager who has put me forward for some very good specialist training opportunities that has really helped me progress in my career.

In Chapter 7 (p.152) Adam described that he had felt "stuck" and disillusioned by his in his career prospects but had been able to negotiate funding that enabled his career moving forward:

> I found a family therapy course and after a lot of bickering, badgering, and pestering, there are all kinds of words you could use, I managed to get funded by the authority for a year on a postgraduate certificate in Systemic Family Therapy. The course gave me lots of new knowledge, skills, and professional confidence that enabled me to move onto the role as a manager…Career

> development has to be personal responsibility but also you need to be proactive to move forward. It would be more beneficial for social workers if there were a career structure.

Elsa's experience of her authority contrasted with the other participants' findings. Although her authority did not have a formal structured career programme they did invest in an advanced social work model of practice, systemic practice, for those working with children and their families, that she outlines as follows:

> When our local authority management changed, they decided to replace the Model of Practice and move to Systemic Family Therapy Practice that entailed an advanced two-year programme at the Tavistock Clinic. This was an accredited course with an expectation that every practitioner would do the first year. The good thing was that I was genuinely interested in the programme whereas there were some staff who were not, so it was difficult to get everyone to embed it into practice.

There has been a shift in Children and Families Service, Adult Services and Youth Justice Services to practice models of social work (e.g., Signs of Safety; Strengthening Families; Systemic Practice; Strengths Approach; Three Conversation; Restorative Justice) to underpin practice and provide a uniform service across the organisation. However, evidence from participants indicates that often when there is a change of management the model changes to meet their preferred model, which impacts on staff and is a costly process.

Drawing the findings together, the above presents an overview of the participants' experiences of career development and opportunities for advancement in their different local authorities/organisations. Currently, available information indicates that the majority of social work local authorities in England do not have a career structure in place for social workers. This is confirmed by the findings from a sample of participants who took part in this research, although there is some recent evidence that some local authorities offer a career structure as an inducement in their recruitment literature (*Community Care,* 2023; e.g., East London NHS Foundation Trust, London; *Social Work for Children* 2024; *Community Care,* Hampshire, 2024). Lack of career development pathways in social work is not a new phenomenon; it has been a perennial issue for decades (Healy, Meagher, and Cullin, 2009) and is linked to one of the reasons that affect recruitment and retention of staff (Cook, *et al.,* 2022). Research by Burns (2011) indicated the importance of recognising social workers' experience, as well as providing a range

of different pathways for career progress, which are also positive indicators of staff retention.

In terms of career advancement, there was a high desire to move onto more specialist intervention/therapeutic roles, as well as having the opportunity of undertaking higher degrees in specific areas of practice – for example, adult safeguarding, child protection, child sexual abuse, or research. Participants considered that there should be avenues built into a career plan, alongside access to funding, to enable this to become achievable. This could provide career opportunities for social workers, as well as service users, with opportunities to engage in therapeutic interventions in-house, which were currently unavailable.

8.8 Theme: Staff Resistance to CPD – Impact on Other Workers

Staff resistance to CPD was not an intended area I had proposed to cover in this study, especially as two-thirds (n=14) (65%)of the participants spoke positive about the impact had on their practice and personal development However, it became a subject that clearly resonated with, and irked, participants, as nearly half of the research participants (n=10) (48%) volunteered information about their work situations where colleagues were resistant to engaging in CPD and flouted rules and expectations of the organisation, doing the minimum to continue with their registration. Concerningly, resistance and/or avoidance was not confined to colleagues but was also evident among managers, with examples of practice not up with current trends or acknowledging the complexities in which social work was practised.

Participants expressed concern that some social work practitioners actively avoided, or were resistant, to undertaking CPD to update their knowledge and skills, preferring to reply on their past experiences of practice. Whilst for others their reasons seemed more complex.

For instance, Elsie commented that a number of social workers in her team were not committed to undertaking CPD as a vehicle towards self-improvement, pointing out the following:

> In my team we have some very “old school social workers” – I’m not even talking about age but by type and years of experience. They reminisce about the past

> "the old days." We are in a completely different world, they have to adapt and change, but there is resistance to this, especially CPD.

Similarly, Elsa, who had eight years' experience and worked in an urban LA that invested in a high level of training, illustrated her observations with the following narrative:

> There are some social workers not interested in developing themselves, that's a feature in some teams - there is this kind of complacency. I see a lot of members of staff – social workers – who have been in their positions for a long time and you know we are in an organisation as agents of change, but, you know, they don't want to go with the changes that the organisation are making in practice and I wonder if that is because they have been in practice for so long…...The local authority has put in a loads of money into it: although they may change again in five or ten years and that may be part of it. It feels a bit tick-box and temporary to some people and they don't see the relevance to their everyday practice... I think it's a shame because some of those people become quite stagnant and maybe kind of become disconnected to the work that they are doing…they are not developing and yes pushing themselves…

In interviews with Seb, he commented that he was pleased when SWE took over from HCPC and it was now the responsibility of every social worker to undertake and evidence CPD each year and get themselves up to date. He shared that from his observation, there had previously been some social work practitioners who had not been fully engaged in CPD, but the shift to SWE regulations required them to access and evidence their engagement, asserting:

> …Some social workers have been in practice for 10/15 years without taking CPD very seriously and cannot even boast one CPD. All they know is that they just realised that they were working, working, working you know, without having any moment to reflect on their practice. Now it is the responsibility of every social worker to try to do research and something new every year in order to get themselves up to date. It can be worrying when CPD is not valued: personally, it has helped me to evidence what I have done.

Seb felt that the approach taken by SWE had been positive and validated CPD for practitioners, and, for him helped him develop his reflective skills, as well as had had a positive effect on his career development.

Another participant Tom considered that the LA had made considerable efforts to facilitate CPD by providing on-line resources and e-learning, although practitioners were not consulted about design, format, or whether the programme was useful to

their role. He commented that practitioners did not always avail themselves of learning opportunities, but he could well understand the course content. He emphasised his concerns and possible reasons for non-engagement making the following point:

> The local authority has put in a number of resources, but it is a real challenge to get some practitioners to use them, they are underutilised. There is a difference in providing them but also providing right support for practitioners to use these resources. So, it is one of the challenges currently on the ground ……there is no study time and yes, that is the bottom line.

Whereas Stewart raised concerns from a different standpoint:

> I have some professionals who do the bare minimum, which, in my view, affects their development…there is then a mad rush by them (social workers) to upload evidence of CPD practice to SWE to ensure that they meet the deadline and requirements. This worries me.

Participant Adam reflected on dilemmas from his own perspective, but also observations from his current role, remarking:

> It is difficult when there are colleagues who are not interested and resistant to doing CPD. I find that unless you are really motivated and keen, or if you have got someone who is really motivated and keeps pushing you on, I think it is a bit easy to get a bit complacent. I have observed this in my role, and I guess it really makes me think about their relationship with the people with whom we work…It is a shame really because those people need to be support and motivated, and maybe then their relationship with CPD may be a bit more different.

Adam acknowledged that there may be many factors affecting CPD and felt it was incumbent on him as a manager to be aware of individual circumstances, and where appropriate to offer support. To increase participation, he had woven opportunities into team meetings that drew on a number of different resources that he considered were supported by team members and led to peer support.

A recurring point in the aforementioned data of participants quotes examples of professional resistance by colleagues to co-operate with rules and expectations concerning CPD. Mattaini and Atkinson (2013, cited in Strier and Bershtling, 2016) cite several historical examples of resistance by social workers in their professional practices, commenting that these “are deeply rooted in social work history” (p.1). The participants’ evidence infers that these colleagues did not feel they needed CPD

training to undertake their roles, or they wanted to make “personal and informal resistance” (Scott, 1985, cited in Strier and Bershtling, 2016, p.4) visible against power and organisational rules. The narratives could equally be read in alignment with what Foucault (1981) described as “micro-resistances” – small, dispersed forms of refusal directed against the power relations of oppressive systems.

In the interview with Milli, it was evident that the lack of CPD to inform and update on some contemporary practice issues, not only applied to social work practitioners but also some senior managers. Milli emphasised that her organisation was, in her view, very forward thinking in their provision of training. However, she expressed dismay about the take up of training by some senior members of staff who had been in the LA for many years, and from her observations, were not up to date about some contemporary practice issues. She described one conversation with a senior manager about the team’s concerns about the increase impact that County Lines and Gang infiltration was having on young people in the area and the risks it posed. As the conversation proceeded the senior manager asked what was she talking about? At this juncture Milli said she wanted to be tactful in her discussion but then found herself posing rather pointed questions: What do you mean you don’t know anything about County Lines? Why, have you not been on the training?

Milli added that the manager admitted she had no knowledge about the subject area which surprised her, especially as this was a major concern affecting young people, including children in the care system. She felt this was a serious omission by a senior manager in childcare on an area that was impacting on the safety of young people in care, as well as in the community, who were being subjected to multiple risks from criminal gangs who had targeted the area. However, Milli was keen to point out that, in contrast to this senior manager’s stance, many of the more recently qualified managers were often present at training events and, in her view, more up to date from her conversations with them.

Participant Lara spoke about looking forward to her BASW *Professional Social Work* Magazine that enabled her to get a snapshot of topical areas of practice, and, similarly, the *Community Care* updating emails, both of which she found informative. She went onto convey:

> I send copies of articles to team members, however, I'm never sure if they read them or are useful as I don't receive any feedback. This is quite disappointing as I find I am interested in what is going on although I understand that you get lost in the wider scheme of things. The day job has got so huge that it's considered a bit of a luxury to try to have the time to read research and kind of everything else that comes across your desk…

Although disappointed about lack of engagement to discuss contemporary issues, Lara added a caveat that she recognised the pressures practitioners experienced from large workloads - rather she felt than a resistance to learning.

Drawing the findings together, lack of commitment to engage in CPD or workplace learning was seen as a barrier and impacted on colleagues, and was, according to participant findings, more notably a stance taken by more experienced, long-term workers rather than less experienced ones. The pattern was also a finding identified in research undertaken for SWE (YouGov, 2021), which reported that a minority of staff had negative or unhelpful attitudes and were resistance to engaging in CPD, with data revealing younger social workers were more likely to be motivated to undertake CPD than older workers. Similarly, this was also a feature in research by Lloyd, *et al.,* (2014) which highlighted the importance of individual attitudes and perceptions regarding workplace learning as being key determinants to motivation to engage in workplace learning (p.11). The social work workplace is a complex and dynamic environment, where, according to Ferguson (2022), offers "rich sources of professional learning for social workers across their careers" (p.3).

Although the comments could be interpreted as ageism (Thompson, 1992,2005, 2020; DHSC, 2020) – as some of the colleagues cited were older and more experienced practitioners who, according to the data, did not feel they needed CPD to undertake their social work roles – they could equally be making a point that connects to Freire's concept of alienation (1970, 1972) against the "dominant ideology of a culture" (their organisation), who are one of the stakeholders, along with SWE, responsible for setting the agenda, rules and exerting control. This is similar to Foucault's (1981) view of resistance and challenges to the power relations of oppressive systems. In Freire's terms, those less powerful (social workers), who have no control over the CPD agenda, leading to them 'opting out' or being resistant to taking up what is on offer. These types of situations could be seen as what Freire

(1970, 1972) describes as alienation, whereas he proposes the shift should be towards learning and growth in direction of conscientization, which is key and central to social work practice.

These findings indicate the importance of CPD being a partnership, as well as providing research, knowledge, and skills that relate to social workers' development, rather than 'top down' and perfunctory. CPD therefore needs to be based on partnership/shared model (Freire, 1970), in which social workers are co-architects of their own learning, rather than passive recipients of an organisationally imposed agenda.

8.9 Theme: Lack of Relevant Physical Working Space

A third of participants (n=7) (33%) spontaneously mentioned the importance of stability of the workplace and importance of having a stable base and opportunities for peer support and consultancy. Research indicates that the physical environment and working conditions for social work practitioners have been issues of contention for a number of years (Munro, 2011; Issac, 2016; Ravalier, 2017; BASW, 2024) and remain so. Specific issues being raised have included over-crowded offices, no allocated desk, lack of personal space, or no access to computer, all of which have had knock-on effects, especially stress and practitioners' well-being. Research by Ravalier, *et al.,* (2021) asserts that social work is one of the most stressful professions in UK, and a survey conducted by Health and Safety Executive (2020) indicated that social workers had one of the highest levels of stress-related sickness absences in the country (cited in Ravalier, *et al.,* 2021). Poor working conditions and stress have also been found to be key factors in the retention of staff (GovUK,2023). This situation also has implications for engagement with service-users, decision making, and the achievement of organisational goals. Research findings also by Ravalier, *et al.,* (2021) found that interviewees were frustrated about the physical environments in which they were expected to operate, "with hotdesking an issue of contempt" (p.1114).

This situation is exemplified in Adam's narrative:

> When I first started in social work those were the days when we had our own desks and we would have a little cupboard and personal space. I turned my cupboard into a sort of resource centre and could pick out a resource and share it with a colleague or supervisee. Now our authority has moved sites and sold

> our building. We no longer have an individual desk or cupboard. You have a locker, but it is not easily accessible. You have to go into the office and find a space; you are not allowed to have or leave anything lying on the desk. There is nowhere to put your resources; you need everything on-line or carry your toolbox with you. It is all so clinical, no personal space or sitting alongside colleagues in your own team; just have to find a space wherever you can. It is not conducive to teamwork or supportive environment, and you are also home-based part of the week. Social work has been so transformational since I came into practice, especially with Covid 19 as well, and a stable base is very important to me for as you know social work can be a very stressful job.

Similarly, Milli, who works for the same authority shared the same concern:

> My authority is in the process of selling off the office buildings and we have been relocated into the main building alongside all the other authority staff. We no longer have any personal space or desks allocated and you have to see what is available when you go into the office. The new arrangements are going to be very impersonal and will make those ad hoc discussions with team members difficult to have. Another concern as team manager is picking up cues when a colleague or team member needs to talk through issues following a visit or extra support because of what they are dealing with.

Another participant, Melissa, in a different local authority, disclosed in her narrative that her organisation was undertaking a similar approach to reorganisation of the office environment, describing the apprehension she felt:

> We are having to work from home as there is a change in our office accommodation as another team's office has been sold, as the council are selling off offices to try and save money, so that team is moving into our space. It means that everything has to be redesigned, with less desk space, and more working at home. This means you don't see many colleagues, so then team cohesion is going to be affected, as well as the team spirit. We now have a good supportive team, and we used to have in-person team meetings but now it is all on Zoom. It is not the same not seeing people face-to-face and picking up body language and being able to address any difficulties or challenges people are facing.

Recalling her situation there was an air of resignation in Naomi's voice, she sounded powerless to influence her organisation to create the working environment and conditions that were more conducive to her and her colleagues needs:

> I think one of the problems with social workers is they are good advocating for clients, but not for themselves. Our organisations are not good at looking after us and pushing our status and its importance. This has happened in our organisation, as the doctors all have their own offices and protected space, and other protections, but we do not and we have had to put up with a lot of office changes and less space and poor working environment… I am not advocating

> moving funds from service users, but we are not very good at standing up and making a noise. I think we need to be more radical and louder about lack of resources and services we need…It has led to a lot of people leaving…We never seem to recover from this, and we are just really struggling in a very busy environment that is not manageable.

Naomi's resignation and feelings of impotency reminded me of Freire's concept of fatalism where he allied this assumption to the colonized mentality, commenting "As long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they fatalistically 'accept' their exploitation. Further, they are apt to react in a passive and alienated manner when confronted with the necessity to struggle for their "freedom and self-affirmation" (Friere,1970, cited in Darder, 2018, p.99). This statement appears to link to Naomi's position. Overall, there is a tendency for social workers to accept their working situations/environments and take on board the agency requirements, including fulfilling the requirements of CPD without complaint, but these are often at personal cost. Historical (Healy, Meagher, and Cullin, 2007), and contemporar*y* research indicates that retention, recruitment, and professional burnout are associated with poor working conditions (Ravalier, Wainwright, Clabburn, Loon, and Smyth, 2021)

Three other participants' (Debra, Lara, and Sara) spoke about the impact of austerity on their local authorities that as a result were 'rationalising buildings.' This was resulting in some offices being closed and different teams, all of whom had their own space, being moved into one area office together. The physical environment space would be smaller; they would not have their own allocated desk or space, and all would shift to 'hotdesking' conditions. Additionally, there would also be an expectation that in future social work staff would shift to a hybrid/agile model of working, resulting in less colleague /peer contact and/or support. This was a feature of concern, especially as findings indicated that the over half (n=11) (52%) valued the opportunity to discuss and reflect casework issues with a peer colleague. This finding also concurs with Jeyasingham's (2014) research, which found hotdesking was seen in negative terms as it reduced the opportunity for reflective discussions concerning areas of practice and led to more isolation of workers.

Agile working in social work is not a new initiative and has been a growing feature of many local authorities over the years (Beck, 2001; Jeyasingham, 2020). It was introduced to encourage more flexible working through mobile equipment, such as

laptops, tablets that enabled uploading documentation or accessing information from different offices or access points in a geographical area belonging to an organisation. Another motivation has been to enable workers to be more responsive to challenges inherent in contemporary practice, as well as opportunities to work closer with colleagues and service users. However, a further thrust toward this approach was a response to issues relating to the financial crisis onset around 2008, and austerity imposed by the Conservative administration thereafter (PwC, 2018). As a result of Covid 19 pandemic and different patterns of work imposed due to restrictions the Hybrid Model of working has become the dominant pattern. This has resulted in more autonomous working, less face-to-face contact with colleagues/peers and isolation. The shift has resulted in less office space availability, with predominantly hot-desking and no personal space, with issues cited by the research participants above. A survey by Community Care (Stevenson, 2019) found that 86% of those surveyed stated that hotdesking was incompatible with their job roles. It caused stress due to issues such as time wasted trying to locate a desk/workspace, lack of opportunity for debriefing with colleagues when returning from a stressful, risky home visit, with similar findings being reported by Jeyasingham (2016). Other authors, such as Ravalier and Boichat (2018), found that working conditions led to a number of negative factors, such as sickness absence, low job satisfaction, high staff turnover, and intention to leave, which had implications for the organisation, as well as service users.

Drawing the findings together, a third of participants explicitly mentioned the ongoing changes in their environmental conditions and the impact this had on their working conditions and well-being. This is not a new problem in social work and has been raised as an issue of contention for many years by researchers, including Munro (2011), Issac (2016), and BASW, (2024) to name a few. However, it has become more pronounced during austerity, with many authorities short of funding, selling buildings, amalgamating different departments, and shifting increasingly towards hot-desking (Stevenson, 2019). Findings from this small cohort indicate that this has a debilitating effect on staff well-being. Research indicates that this shift is incompatible with the role in social work (Jeyasingham, 2016; Stevenson, 2019; Ravalier, *et al.,*2019,2021). Furthermore, the Health and Safety Executive (2020) indicated that social work was one of the most stressful professions and had one of the highest stress-related sickness absences in the country (cited in Ravalier *et al.,* 2021). According to

research by Ravalier (2018); GovUK (2023) and Tham (2022) it is one of the key factors affecting the retention of staff – adding a further layer of structural disadvantage to an already pressurised profession and, by extension, undermining the conditions in which CPD and reflective practice can meaningfully take place.

8.10 Chapter Summary

The previous chapter identified the types of CPD organisations were prepared to provide, that primarily focused on mandatory programmes, early years' provision and programmes that underpin agency models. Alongside these participants demonstrated personal responsibility, proactiveness, and professional curiosity to supplement these opportunities to meet the increasing complexity of the needs of service users in contemporary social work practice.

The data suggests in this chapter suggests that a top-down organisational approach continues to be the model in force that does not take account of the overall needs of practitioners, or their aspirations. Similar to other studies (e.g. Brady, 2014; Halton, Powell, and Scanlan, 2015; YouGov 2020) the data indicates that CPD is beset by the milieu, time constraints, heavy workload, funding, lack of access to advanced/expert/specialist programmes for more experienced workers. Additionally, the lack of career structure that offers an array of options, such as attaining more advanced skills, research, or higher qualifications, hinders progress and can be a factor to retention.

Chapter Nine: Summary and Conclusions

9.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter will provide a consideration of key findings from the research study and their wider significance. The research study examined the unique perspective of social work practitioners on continuing professional development (CPD) in a work context where they were expected to meet the regulatory obligations set down by the regulator, Social Work England (SWE) (2019), as well as continue to upskill and update their knowledge and skills in terms of statutory regulations in order to practise. Another aspect was to explore how social workers' development, career, and personal aspirations were met in the context of decisions around CPD and the wider political climate and whether there was a real choice, or whether this was organisationally driven and controlled.

The chapter will provide an overview of findings in response to the questions, consider the strengths and limitations of the research, as well as its contribution to knowledge both theoretically and methodologically. The integrated findings sections and discussion sections draw on the theoretical frameworks (Chapter 3) apply the ideas of four philosophical theorists, Mills (1959), Freire (1970), Fromm (1976), and Foucault (1977), as well as connecting social work theories to evidence provided by participants. Additionally, the conclusion presents recommendations for policy and practice for social work practitioners, stakeholders, and social work policymakers, as well as suggestions for future research.

9.2 Summary of Research Findings

The study set out to explore social workers understanding of CPD, and how they navigated this alongside work-related tasks and personal responsibilities.

The overarching research question was:

How do Social Workers navigate Continuing Professional Development to sustain and develop their practice and professional identity?
With three subordinate questions:

1. What do social workers understand by CPD?

2. Why do social workers do CPD?
3. What are the perceived facilitators and barriers to CPD?

These questions drove the literature review set out in Chapter 2 which itself influenced the semi-structured interview schedule.

9.2.1 What do social workers understand by CPD?

The results of the study demonstrated that all participants had a clear understanding of CPD, its objectives, what it meant to them, and that it was necessary to comply with the SWE regulations (2019; 2023) in order to continue to practise as a registered social worker. CPD opportunities or access to resources were largely internal, delivered via an organisational approach that focused on the agency's objectives and was contingent on their agenda. However, participants' narratives indicate that there was an array of different activities made available, both on-line and face-to-face until social distancing came into force following Covid 19 Pandemic. The opportunities offered were mandatory updating courses (e.g., safeguarding, risk, data protection, health and safety, lone working policy), as well as social policy, agency procedures and new legislation and practice. In addition, there were courses on social work issues, such as domestic abuse, risk assessment/management, motivational interviewing, or organisation model of practice e.g. signs of safety, strengthening families, person-centred approaches.

There was criticism, primarily from more experienced participants, that courses were pitched at basic content for newly-qualified practitioners, rather than providing more advanced knowledge and research-based CPD, which experienced practitioners required, particularly if they were in supervisory roles or dealing with the more complex cases – CPD opportunities were also criticised as being repetitive. CPD opportunities/resources were largely internal, with a top-down approach, driven by the agency's objectives, which left social workers' learning contingent on the organisation's agenda.

During the Covid 19 Pandemic, when my research data was collected, it was notable that as organisations shifted to on-line CPD provision, participants began to expand their own CPD landscape, demonstrating professional curiosity (Burton and Revell, 2018), and finding a rich landscape of opportunities (Wenger-Trayer and Wenger-Trayer, 2020) that were available on different social work and research platforms on

the internet. These included, for example, podcasts, free webinars, joining seminars where they could participate, listening to Ted Talks, as well as seeking out resources and research to develop knowledge about different topics and/or interventions. Overall, these experiences and choices enabled participants to extend their knowledge, be more autonomous in their learning and, importantly, it helped reduce isolation, which was a feature experienced by a number of participants and reflected existing in research (Ravalier, McFadden, Gillen, Mallett, Nicholl and Neill, 2023).

9.2.2 Why do social workers do CPD?

Professionalism was a key consideration in the interview data. This overarching theme had a number of sub-themes highlighted by participants, such as professional status, professional accountability, responsibility, and, importantly, for them professional identity. These areas provided the core ingredients to become, and be seen, as a professional social work practitioner (PCF, 2014, 2018; Webb, 2017; Boahen and Wiles, 2019), which was an important status, and crucial to progression.

Another finding indicated that CPD was important to participants as they were practising in a constantly evolving context where there were new social issues and trends that become part of social work practice. Data illustrated that participants were motivated to update and build on their knowledge bases in order to work effectively with service users, who presented with an array of complex issues. In addition, over half of the participants made the point of stressing the importance of ensuring that their legal knowledge was up to date and accurate. This aspect was important for those who were working in multi-disciplinary teams, especially as some participants reported incidents of being marginalised and their opinions discounted by other professionals. Participants were active in seeking out and accessing courses and resources across a wide spectrum and had taken ownership of their own development to provide effective, competent services and to feel confident in their roles. In a wider context participants' narrative accorded with neoliberal principles linked to Foucault's concept of governmentality that individual participant social workers had become "responsible, rational individuals" (Brown, 2015, p. 43) where they had taken on self-responsibility and managing CPD in addition to other tasks.

CPD is a requirement for social workers to undertake annually to comply with the regulations of Social Work England (2019, 2023) in order to continue to practise as a social worker. Whilst this was not a specific question raised with participants it is one they all raised at some time during the interview. There were some minor criticisms about the SWE renewal process, with a minority feeling it was a tick-box exercise and some questioning the usefulness of the submissions to evaluate whether the practitioner met the standards. The majority of participants welcomed having their own bespoke regulator and the clarity given about what registrants needed to submit to meet the requirements, which was seen in preference to the process designed by HCPC, the previous regulator, which many participants described as placing them under “threat” and “fear” that they may be selected for their CPD to be audited (HCPC, 2012). It is worth noting that fieldwork for the current study was carried out before SWE disclosed, they would not be auditing or assessing individual practitioners’ CPD returns (SWE, 2024, 2025).

9.2.3 What are the perceived Facilitators and Barriers to CPD?

Facilitators

This first section focuses on the facilitators and enablers that participants identified as positive influences for undertaking CPD. As noted above, organisations provided a range of CPD learning and developmental opportunities that correlated with their strategic plans and to meet their statutory training duties. Whilst these opportunities were welcome overall, findings indicate that these did not meet the needs of experienced social workers and there was a desire by many to develop their practice to a more advanced level. More broadly, accessing quality educational and training opportunities were seen by participants as core to providing an effective service for service users. Participants were resourceful, self-initiating a range of relevant CPD that broadened the landscape of opportunities.

Factors that facilitated and enabled CPD learning included being motivated, not only to fulfil the requirements of re-registration with the regulatory body (SWE, 2019) or compliance with statutory work policies/procedures but to increase their knowledge and skills to integrate and improve their practice and ensure they were up-to-date, and provide as good a service as they could.

Undertaking CPD to facilitate career advancement was consistently highlighted by the majority of participants. There were no formal schemes in any of the organisations where they worked, though three quarters opted to undertake the Practice Educator Programme (PEPS) as a route and were at various stages of completion. This was seen as a plus to many participants who had were in supervisory roles who had had no formal training in this area. A small number of participants had recently accessed a government funded scheme for those in children and family services in supervisory roles. An enabler highlighted by participants in adult services was fact that they had to undertake specialist courses to undertake statutory duties and these were certificated (e.g., Best Interest Assessors, Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP). Attendance at these courses was seen as a route to develop their career plans.

A further finding was linked to supervision and support networks. The majority of participants had a positive view about supervision when it was evenly balanced between case management and critical reflection on practice, with a minority voicing dissatisfaction with their supervision that was focused on caseload management. Participants' spoke about the different networks of support for their roles and learning, particularly peer supervision, where colleagues listened to their concerns, were supportive, and provided a consultative role to help them work through their thoughts and resolve issues. This was particularly valued by participants' who spoke positively about workplace learning with, and through colleagues, as well as direct emotional and practice support it offered. An important finding from the study is that when social distancing and homeworking became necessary due to the Covid 19 Pandemic (intermittently from March 2020 to March 2021) the loss of direct contact impacted on participants, some reported feelings of isolation, though this was partially resolved when formal and informal channels were put in place.

Barriers

The majority of participants highlighted a major barrier in the lack of protected or study time away from front-line practice, which was often demanding, crisis driven and complex. Although organisations arranged internal training days, participants' reported there were often when they had to pull out due to work crises, lack of back-

up and their responsibility to find a replacement for their day-to-day work, which was often not possible. Participants usually prioritised service user needs over training. A number of participants found the shift to on-line training during social distancing and homeworking problematic, as work commitments were factored around the training, which led no time or space for thinking or reflecting on the subject matter in which they were engaged. This predicament was another finding highlighted by a number of participants who raised the importance of being in the right state of mind psychologically to focus on and benefit from CPD.

The majority of participants considered their organisations provided a good range of basic and mandatory updating provision. However, there were a number of concerns about the quality of the content and level of courses/programmes for more experienced practitioners. The participants' viewed there was a need for organisations to provide more expert trainers, as well as providing a career pathway that provided relevant training for social workers when transitioning to a new role, particularly into management or a supervisory role. Participants indicated this was not a formalised process and most training was confined to e-learning and learning on the job, which caused anxiety, especially with responsibility of the position. Other significant barriers included changes in the physical working environment due to downsizing by organisations of their office space which meant that the variety of staff had now shifted to 'hotdesking.' Whilst this is not a new problem within social work, participants spoke of the debilitating effect of not having an allocated desk, space, and opportunity to be with trusted colleagues and benefit from their support (Stevenson, 2020).The physical working environment plays an important, if overlooked, role, providing opportunities for informal coaching, water-cooler conversations and unstructured interactions that may contribute to learning and support. An unintended finding of the study was that half of the participants indicated that resistance and avoidance by other staff members to participating in CPD. Participants indicated that this lack of motivation and engagement clearly had an impact on colleagues and organisational culture.

Overall, the study demonstrates that social workers see CPD as an important part of maintaining and improving the standard of their practice. They are often

responsibilised to be active learners, but decision-making at organisational level often limits the horizons of CPD provision and opportunities available to them.

9.3 Challenges of Research Study

Although I had had the benefit of undertaking a MPhil many years ago, at that time I was in an academic role and had the benefit of colleagues around me many of whom had been through the process of undertaking a PhD or who were undertaking research. This provided ready-made opportunities for discussion and guidance. The role as a part-time doctoral researcher can be isolating and demanding (Lally,2012) especially fitting it around other responsibilities, such as work. I had been attending various lectures and workshops at the university, but we were then suddenly affected by Covid 19 Pandemic that meant these opportunities came to a halt, moving on-line.

Around that time, I was in the process of planning my data collection and the social distancing and other implications meant I had to adjust my plans to familiarise myself and develop more technical competence and skills to use different virtual platforms. Not having direct support to do this was, at times, challenging and anxiety provoking especially about losing data. Trying to juggle this, my responsibility to my job, and ill-health were all challenges and affected my ability to work consistently and concentrate on my PhD and work through the various processes.

Due to the Covid 19 Pandemic and imposed social distancing and other restrictions I did not have direct contact through my work with social work agencies. This led me to amend my participant recruitment methods; while remaining within the boundaries of the ethical approval I had been granted for the study. Therefore, I devised a flyer and circulated this to a number of social workers in different agencies who then passed them onto colleagues and meant I was using a snowballing approach (Coleman, 1958; Goodman, 2011), which facilitated a diverse cohort of potential participants to come forward.

9.4 Limitations

The possible limitations of the methodology of research study have been covered in Chapter 7.49. To summarise the research data was collected during the Covid 19

Pandemic when the restrictions of social distancing meant that I was unable to interview participants on a face-to-face basis as originally envisaged. This meant that I needed to rethink and restructure my approach. Although there were some technical problems during the on-line interviews, these were minor and did not impact significantly on the data collection process. However, a limitation of virtual interviewing is lack of opportunity to take account of non-verbal interactions, for instance, there is a possibility of missing nuances, and/or picking up cues, and not visually been seen to demonstrate active listening.

The research interviews generated a plethora of rich thick data (Ryle, 1968; Geertz, 1973), which I manually coded using Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis six-phase approach (2006, 2022). Although a structured process there was a possibility of missing patterns or connections. With hindsight it would have been helpful to have developed my skills using NVivo 12 (Lumivero, 2017) which could also have reduced the time I spent manually analysing the data but it could also have had the advantage of giving me reassurance that I was accurately interpreting the data and ensuring I maximised participants' voices and perspectives on areas important to them. Due to the timeframe, and word limitation, my research study has only been able to use a portion of the data gathered from participants. It is planned in due course to use material in a research paper to ensure that participants' voices and perspectives are fully explored.

The research provides a snapshot at a specific, but crucial time, with education and training key to addressing perennial concerns about recruitment, retention and practice standards which are key policy concerns for the regulator and government (SWE,2020; MacAlister, 2022; DfE, 2024).

9.5 Contribution to Knowledge

As indicated, twenty-one diverse social worker practitioners, in various social work roles in England, working in a range of urban and rural organisations contributed to this small-scale empirical research study. Importantly my aim was for the research to provide a platform where social work practitioners' voices could be listened to and

heard, rather than dismissed and marginalised (Gordon, 2018; Astvik, Welander and Hellgren,2021; Amas and Fox, 2023). As indicated in the discussion chapter many participants verbally reflected at the end of the interviews that they had appreciated being able to contribute to the research and give their views, as no one had previously asked their opinion about CPD and this gave them an opportunity to talk about their career and aspirations. In this context my research offers a unique contribution to the knowledge base of social work continuing professional development by drawing on the extensive data, illustrated in the participants' narratives, which emphasise their perspectives, lived experiences and the distinct types of facilitators and enablers that are supportive to effectively undertaking CPD. The study's focus on who gets to choose what CPD social workers can access probes the interplay between structure and individual and professional agency and the interactions between power, discipline, compliance, and dissent. These issues were particularly prominent where participants discussed the obstacles and barriers that affected their capacity to wholeheartedly participate in CPD to develop their practice.

An important contribution is that the research findings highlighted that the majority of social work participants wanted to be the best they could in their respective jobs, with the objective of doing their best for service users to address their issues or needs. However, participants also had career aspirations which were not addressed within current structures. A significant number of participants were keen to move into more therapeutic work with service users, some in their current area of practice by having the opportunity of becoming an advanced practitioner. Others wanted to attain expertise through having the opportunity to undertake training to deliver specialist interventions e.g. family therapist, play therapist, trauma therapist, systemic therapist, cognitive behavioural therapist, or counsellor. Some wanted to attain higher formal qualifications, in research, or particular area of practice, for example safeguarding, child protection or management. This shift correlates with the recognition that as social workers advance in their careers, they engage in more complex practice issues, or alternatively when they move on to more senior roles there is a need to increase opportunities to develop their knowledge and expertism.

A gap in advanced practice opportunities was recognised in my research, and similarly in research by Cook (2024). Other research by Cook, Carder, Blake-Holmes,

and Yussif (2024) on retaining of social workers, found there were Critical Career Episodes (CCEs) that affected social workers at different points in their careers and were influential factors whether or not they remained in the profession. The research findings highlighted the importance of organisations having career pathways that offered social workers alternative ways to develop their careers. One solution recommended was to create opportunities for specialisms, generativity, and mobility (Cook, *et al.,* 2024) as these could promote professional development and retention, thus sustaining and retaining social workers in the profession. It would be a way forward that very much accords with the voices of a proportion of participants in my study, as well as noted as a significant issue spanning decades, with retention remaining high on the agenda and affecting delivery of services (see recent research by UNISON, 2022a; Ravalier *et al*., 2020, 2023; YouGov, 2021;Johnson *et al*., 2022; Association of Directors of Children's Services, 2022; Skills for Care, 2022; Department for Education, 2023a; BASW 2023a).The need for advanced learning in the social work profession was also recognised by Lord Laming (2009) and, similarly in the government review on social work education by Croisdale-Appleby (2014). Although advanced practitioner programmes exist, my findings highlight that barriers to accessing advanced CPD persist: these barriers are linked to awareness, time, and financial costs of participating. Their views will be outlined in more depth below in recommendations for policy and practice below.

The opportunity to undertake advanced relevant education and training is essential for staff roles that cover responsibility for work-placed learning, supervising, and evaluating staff practice. Many social work practitioners who had made the transition to senior roles spoke openly about the responsibility they encountered as they did not have the underpinning skills and knowledge to feel confident and effective and their development was largely left to chance. As the findings indicate there has been some recently funded and promoted initiatives in conjunction with a number of organisations (e.g., DfE & RiP) that were seen as a positive shift by those participants who had had the opportunity of attendance.

Participants lived experiences reveals the challenges of navigating CPD in the workplace, alongside managing their day-to-day practice and personal lives. The findings also encapsulated participants' career aspirations, highlighting that they had

a passion for professional and personal development and, importantly, were keen to develop more specialist expertise in roles that would enable them to apply a range of social work/psychosocial interventions that would be beneficial to service users. This would offer service users an opportunity for more continuity of services, reducing waiting times and would be a positive spin-off, or in fact a realisation of the objectives of CPD initiatives in social work. The shift to in-house provision could reduce outsourcing of referrals to other agencies where there are protracted delays to access relevant interventions. A shift to this provision could improve quality of life for service users, as well as empower them to be self-determining in order to have more control over their lives, which is one of the aims of social work practice (Biestek, 1961; Banks, 1999, 2001; 2012; Parrott, 2005, 2014; BASW, 2014, 2021; SWE, 2019). It could also give social worker participants more job satisfaction while transforming social work provision (Cook, *et al.,*2024*)*.

The thesis also makes a contribution to knowledge in novel applications of theoretical perspectives to the research topic. Mill's sociological imagination gives us a wider context for the travails of individual social workers: their personal troubles in accessing good quality and appropriate CPD reflect public issues of neoliberalism, austerity, also demonstrating traits of Rizer's McDonaldisation (1993) theory.

These basic, standardised approaches to CPD seem to leave little space for the emancipatory pedagogies advocated by Freire. In Fromm's terms, the provision that participants discussed reflecting *having* rather than *being* modes of knowledge, learning, and practice. Foucault's work on power, discipline, governmentality and surveillance is also relevant to the contemporary landscape on CPD: in a context where social workers have to document their CPD to maintain their professional registration, it is possible to envisage a situation where practitioners become docile bodies in accepting the limited offer available to them rather than using scarce time and resources to argue for more transformative approaches to CPD.

9.6 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Based on the findings from this small-scale empirical research there are a number of recommendations I propose that government, professional organisations, trade

unions, and stakeholders consider as ways of enhancing the continuing professional development for social workers, such as effectively developing their practice to a more advanced level, promoting their professional status, standing in the community, and contribute to reducing the negativity often portrayed by the media (Leedham, 2022; Koutsounia, 2023; SWE, 2023; Hanley, 2025).There are a number of barriers outlined in the findings section (chapter 8) in the study that affect social workers' opportunities for development and advancement in their roles that affect job satisfaction and retention. These include lack of support and funding to train in specialist roles, as well as funding and support to attain higher qualifications or undertake research, lack of study time and being beset by excessive workloads (YouGov, 2023).These factors are recognised as contributing to lack of retention of social workers, that remains an ongoing issue for organisations in England, the UK, and globally (Ravalier and Boichat, 2018; Cook, Carder, and Zschlomler, 2022) and are an disincentive for more experienced social workers to remain (Cook, *et al.,*2024).

In order to address social worker retention and provide, what is termed a "pull factor," (Lee, 1966) some organisations in England (e.g. East London NHS Foundation Trust, Community Care, 2023) are providing career pathways and opportunities for further training and weaving these into their employment terms. This provision currently relies on the discretion of individual organisations. Its inclusion in employment conditions nationally would recognise this as a need and an important benchmark. It is an area that would be beneficial to all social workers and provide more equality if this were structurally integrated into social workers' conditions of service. This would enable social workers to plan, invest in their careers and organisation and accord with the expressed narratives of many of the participants in the study.

One area I recommend is explored that would enhance the social work profession, increase opportunities, service delivery and retention could be through supporting and funding social workers to undertake specialist education and training in the areas of practice, as identified in 9.5 above. This could lead to more job satisfaction, provide a range of in-house specialist interventions for service users, as well as career opportunities and go some way to encouraging retention. In-house provision, rather

than outsourcing, would also have the benefit of reducing the lengthy waiting times currently service users encounter, be more seamless in terms of delivery and cost effective.

The need for advanced learning was recognised by Lord Laming (2009) in his review of child protection recommended that there should be fully funded practice focused post-graduate qualification for children's social workers (p.54, point 27) to take account of the complexity of working in child protection. Similarly, in a government review on social work education, Croisdale-Appleby (2014), recommended that social work practitioners required a "new comprehensive continuing professional development CPD framework for the profession" (p.24, Recommendation 20). This should be based on three areas: the social worker as a practitioner, the social worker as a professional, and the social worker as a social scientist, with a recommendation that it should be modelled on the General Medical Council (GMC) (2012) CPD for doctors and developed in partnership with representatives from organisations and stakeholder groups.

Currently social work practitioners are denied opportunities to access this type of advancement due to structural factors, such as lack of dedicated study time, career planning entitlement, and, importantly, an absence of funding to access higher educational opportunities for social workers. Absence of funding in particular has been a long-term issue and not promoted or supported by regulatory bodies in the past (JUC/SWEC, 2006, cited in Croisdale-Appleby, 2014, p.16), a situation dissimilar to many in allied professionals.

Looking at social and political needs there are a number of pressing developmental and ethical issues that affect social worker's CPD, particularly two pressing areas come to mind, first, Artificial Intelligence, which is being implemented in organisations without much public debate, which has considerable implications for service users and social workers. Secondly, the Assisted Dying Bill where it is envisaged social workers will play a key role, will be ethically challenging, not only for social workers identified to participate but span across the profession as a whole. Both these developments require sensitive, quality CPD opportunities to ensure that ethical and professional standards are maintained and the voices of the vulnerable can be heard.

Additionally, other pressing public issues, for example, grooming, county lines, domestic abuse, mental health issues and personal troubles they inflict on individuals (Mills,1959) highlight that CPD for social workers remains key to providing effective interventions.

It would be beneficial to the social work profession if more social workers were encouraged to access funding to participate in research or higher educational awards. However, this is unlikely to become a reality unless it is promoted as an advantage to the profession and funding made available through organisations such as Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and/or National Institute for Health and Social Care Research (NIHR). To facilitate this, it should be more encouraged, promoted and supported by professional organisations representatives: this would entail a sustained commitment to upskilling practitioners to become researchers and backfilling their posts to allow them to take part in development activities.

A third consideration I would promote to policy makers, organisations, unions, professional organisations, and regulatory authority Social Work England, is to build into social workers' employment conditions annual study days leave. Overall, the study found that social workers were highly committed to learning and developing to increasing their knowledge, skills, awareness of research to integrate into their practice in order to provide a more advanced quality service for service users. However, they were faced with major barriers, such as high caseloads and lack of time to have space for critical reflection and learning to effectively manage this. Integrating study leave into conditions of service would bring social work in line with the entitlement that already exists for many other professionals working in the delivery of health, care and allied fields have as a right. The research found that the absence of this was a 'bone of contention' for many participants who felt marginalised, and undervalued. Many social workers work alongside other health professionals with the same service user groups, yet this disparity exists. Contemporary social work practice is complex, demanding, and challenging. Study leave would provide much needed time for learning, development and for critical reflection and reinvigorate social work practice. It is also notable from my findings that the duties placed on employers under Standard 6 of the Social Workers'

Standards (Local Government Association, 2020) to provide support, time and information about CPD and specialist development are not being met. These standards should be reviewed and evaluated in conjunction with Social Work England and BASW with a view to making these aspirations a reality.

9.7 Future Research

The research findings stemming from this study indicate that there is a high commitment by social work practitioners to learning and developing their practice and using the resources from a variety of sources, such as their employers. However, as the findings section illustrates during the Covid 19 Pandemic, participants demonstrated their creativity, professional curiosity, and ability to access numerous resources on-line, such as podcasts, webinars etc., (see Table 2 Appendix 17, p.354) that met their individual CPD and learning at that time. As noted in the previous chapter, the shift towards home-working and virtual practice as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic have far-reaching impacts for social work. Their implications for CPD: both in terms of the kinds of CPD available and how they should be delivered (face to face, virtually or hybrid?) would provide a fruitful context for research.

As the Findings and Discussion chapters and Recommendations for Policy and Practice indicate there are limited specific CPD developmental opportunities for experienced social workers to access advanced learning in their specific area of practice, move sideways into another specialist role, or have the opportunity to access education and training to transfer to therapeutic specialism to work service user group (e.g., trauma therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy).

The small-scale research study provides a snapshot with a limited number of participants, covering both rural and urban organisations of how CPD contributed to their delivery of social work services for both adult services and children and families. Further research on a larger scale is needed to explore whether the findings in this study and how CPD is delivered are the norm across social work organisations or whether there are alternative models of CPD offered by organisations, particularly around supporting social workers to access specialist training to engage in therapeutic work and/or access to more advanced level of education and learning.

These key areas were identified as “missing” from current CPD development. Participants’ narratives indicate that these would provide more job satisfaction, as well as, importantly, enabling them to gain expertise in intervention skills that would be beneficial to service users in addressing complex issues.

There is some evidence that career planning is helpful to retention (Cook, Carder, and Zschomler, 2022; Biggart, Ward, Cook, and Schofield, 2017). Job satisfaction and retention are key issues that continue to beset the social work profession in England and internationally, lead to organisational disruption and, importantly, affect delivery of services to service users. The recent research by Cook, Carder, Blake-Holmes, and Yussif (2024) promotes a shift to addressing these areas as a possible solution.

The issue of voice (*whose choice)* was an important thread for the research study: this highlights the need to look beyond top-down approaches where the key mandate for recording CPD comes from the regulator. It is also important to listen more to the voices of social workers themselves (a starting point for my study) about what kinds of CPD work for them and how barriers can be removed. BASW would play an important role in this work, alongside the trades union that represent workers in the sector.

9.8 Researcher’s Reflections on Research Study

A recurring theme for over forty years is that social work sits at a “crossroads” (Lymbery, 2001, p.381; Shemmings and Little, 2017, p. 69), or there is a “crisis in social work” (McCulloch and Taylor, 2018; Lavalette, 2019; p.3). Social work is positioned within a rapidly changing area, both internally with political governmental policy changes, amidst the external effects of globalisation, austerity and changing social issues with emerging policies and new initiatives to address these. As the literature review indicates in England there have been significant shifts and changes (Lavalette, 2017; Wiles, 2017; Jones, R., 2019), not only because of governments of various political perspectives ideological shifts to incorporate neoliberal polices, but that have also led to strategic changes in how social work services are delivered due to these influences. These have been commented on by authors, such as Ixer (2013)

and Croisdale-Appleby (2014), who observe that in comparison with other countries, social work in England has been extensively shaped by government influence.

It was against this background, alongside my own positive experience of social work education, both pre and post qualification, that I selected my PhD topic around an interest in, and around opportunities in Continuing Professional Development. Through my roles as Lecturer/Tutor in social work education, working at pre and post qualifying levels, I had considerable contact with social workers in various roles and organisations. I became increasingly aware of the effects that austerity was having on local authorities and organisations, especially the paring back of CPD learning and develop opportunities for social workers, and the contrast in provision compared to pre-2008 financial crash (Jordon and Drakeford, 2012; Rogowski, 2013, 2020; Bamford, 2015; Lavalette, 2019; Bamford & Bilton, 2020). Social workers need to be resilient, knowledgeable, and skilled to respond to these challenges especially as they are working with complexity in stressful, changing environments but investment in their overall development to reach their full potential is not prioritised.

Reflecting on my journey of this research study is not easy or straightforward as there have been so many twists, turns, distinct stages and decision-making along the way, some facilitatory, others debilitating that have affected progress. Of major significance is that the research data were collected during one of the Covid 19 Pandemic lockdown periods during 2021. As already noted encompassing the changes was a challenge, not only for myself, but also for participants as they were already engaged in making major adjustments to their day to day working practices in order to effectively work with, and support service users, who were already coping with an array of personal issues, but needing to adjust to significant life events. I became acutely aware during the data gathering process of the impact on the social work participants, the traumas they were dealing with that affected their well-being, which is also well-documented (UNISON, 2022; Miller and Grise-Owens, 2024; Owen, *et al.,* 2024; McFadden, *et al.,* 2024). Despite all these challenges the participants were enthusiastic about taking part in the study and did so as fragments of their narratives illustrate, doing so in an open, frank, but thoughtful way. It would not have been possible to have enabled me to gain such a plethora of rich data,

without their commitment that enabled me first-hand to hear their wide range of perspectives through their voices, for which I am extremely grateful.

As the social worker participants' voices illustrate there is a high commitment to CPD learning as a way of enhancing their skills and development, with an underpinning desire to increase their expertism. Their overall objective was to attain a higher level of knowledge to facilitate interventions to address service uses issues that were identified through the assessment process (Smale, Tuson, and Statham, 2000;Trevithick, 2000; Milner and O'Byrne, 2009).The majority of participants wanted to be in a position to provide these interventions directly to service users, but lack of expertise to undertake the intervention or lack of time due to workload demands often did not provide these as options.

Overall, participants saw CPD as a way of plugging gaps to enhance their practice, but due to the different barriers discussed in the findings, often accessing relevant and quality CPD is not guaranteed and remains highly dependent by the choices and delivery of organisations. CPD is two-fold, one it is incumbent on all social workers to undertake and submit CPD to SWE in order to register to continue to practice. Secondly, CPD is an important arena through which social workers increase their knowledge bases, skills and research mindedness, all key requirements when working with the complex, changing and challenging demands in the field of social work. However, there is an increasing need to recognise the additional and increasingly significant role that is part of their function as defined by Croisdale-Appleby (2014, p. 15); that of the role as social worker and social scientist. Social work, since its inception, has faced many shifts, changes, and challenges responding effectively to a range of complex issues. Social work is at another crossroads. There needs to be a review of the role, with opportunities to attain the attributes that are more fitting for social work practitioners in the twenty-first century that requires a commitment from all stakeholders.

Through sharing my research with participants, and disseminating my findings to a wider audience, it is my aim to highlight issues and contribute to the body of CPD research already available internationally in this field. My desire is to contribute to

changes in policy and practice that can be beneficial and empowering to social workers, and, hopefully, provide opportunities to counter the barriers that have been highlighted through the lived experiences so vividly illustrated through the voices of participants in this study.

9.9 Concluding Reflections

This conclusion zooms out from the perspectives of twenty-one social work participants to consider how this study contributed to knowledge about CPD and social work.

The research data demonstrate that social worker participants practise in a complex evolving social work context, with shifting priorities, demands, and lack of overall autonomy, but where CPD has to be managed and interwoven into the busy work schedule and their personal lives. The findings demonstrate that social workers have a high commitment to professionalism, as well as its attendant building blocks, and they see CPD as one of the ways that they can improve their skills, knowledge, and practice.

Additionally, it provides a platform for them to move forward in their careers and meet their aspirations, with an overriding goal to provide appropriate interventions for service users, within an ethical and social justice model. The findings also list a range of barriers highlighted by the participants as factors that hindered opportunities to engage with CPD opportunities. It draws on research and highlights changes in practice that can possibly provide solutions to addressing long-term issues around recruitment and retention rates in the social work profession that remain a major area of concern.

It is clear from research that long-standing concerns remain about the role, focus and future of the profession. It is evident from the testimony of participants that CPD is not fulfilling its role in supporting and improving best practice, nor is it being harnessed as a tool to provide social workers with deeper theoretical, ethical, or practice-based models for their work. This hollowed-out approach to CPD almost as a defensive mechanism to ensure a common floor for practice reflects wider troubles

in the profession itself. Rather than focus on exclusively on setting a baseline for practice, all stakeholders in social work should promote CPD as a mechanism to offer real change to social workers and service users, who see the gulf between practice as it is and practice as it could/should be on a daily basis. This would allow the profession to move closer towards making a reality of the social justice goals of social work.

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Appendix 1:

Literature Search Strategy

Literature searches were conducted using electronic databases via Brunel University Library and Open University Library. These included:

- Boolean search engine that has techniques to refine and focus searches using keywords with operators (AND, OR, NOT)
- Google Scholar
- Educational Information Centre (ERIC)
- Applied Social Science Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)
- SCOPUS is a multidisciplinary bibliographic database. It covers science, social science and arts and humanities publications.
- Web of Science (WoS).

Websites:

The following websites were used to access social work, social work education (pre and post qualification): social work research and practice.

- British Association of Social Workers (BASW) www.https://basw.co.uk
- Social Care Institute for Excellence www.https://scie.org.uk
- Community Care: https://wwwcommunity care.co.uk
- Government UK: https://www.gov.uk
- Department for Education: https://www.dfe.co.uk
- Department for Health and Social Care: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health-and-social-care

Social Work Education

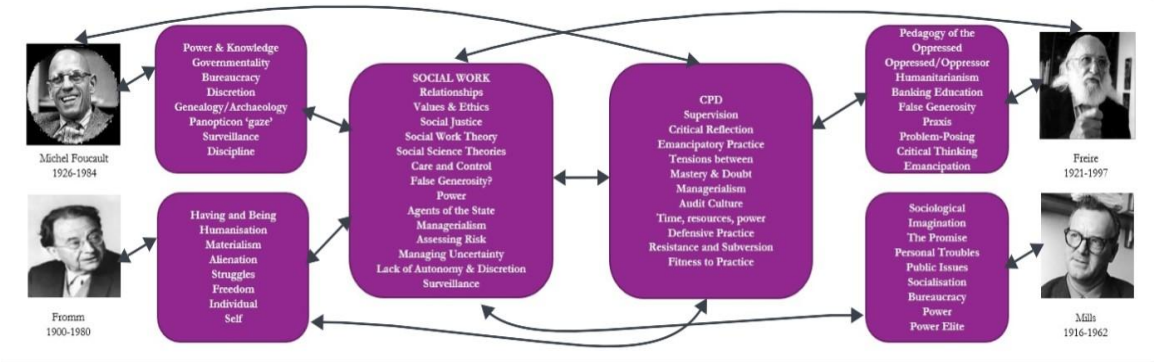
- Higher Education Academy: https://www/international.head.ac.uk/
- The College of Social Work: https://tcsw.org.uk/home
- Social Work England: https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk
- British Library e-theses online (Ethos): https://www.bl.uk/collection/ethos
- Open University: https://oro.open.ac.uk/view/thesis/
- Research in Practice: https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk

Archival Research

The Almshouse Association: https://www.almshouses.org
Central Council for Education and Training of Social Work (CCETSW)
Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC)
https:// www.hcpc.org/assets/documents/
General Social Care Council (GSCC) https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
The College of Social Work: https://tcsw.org.uk/home

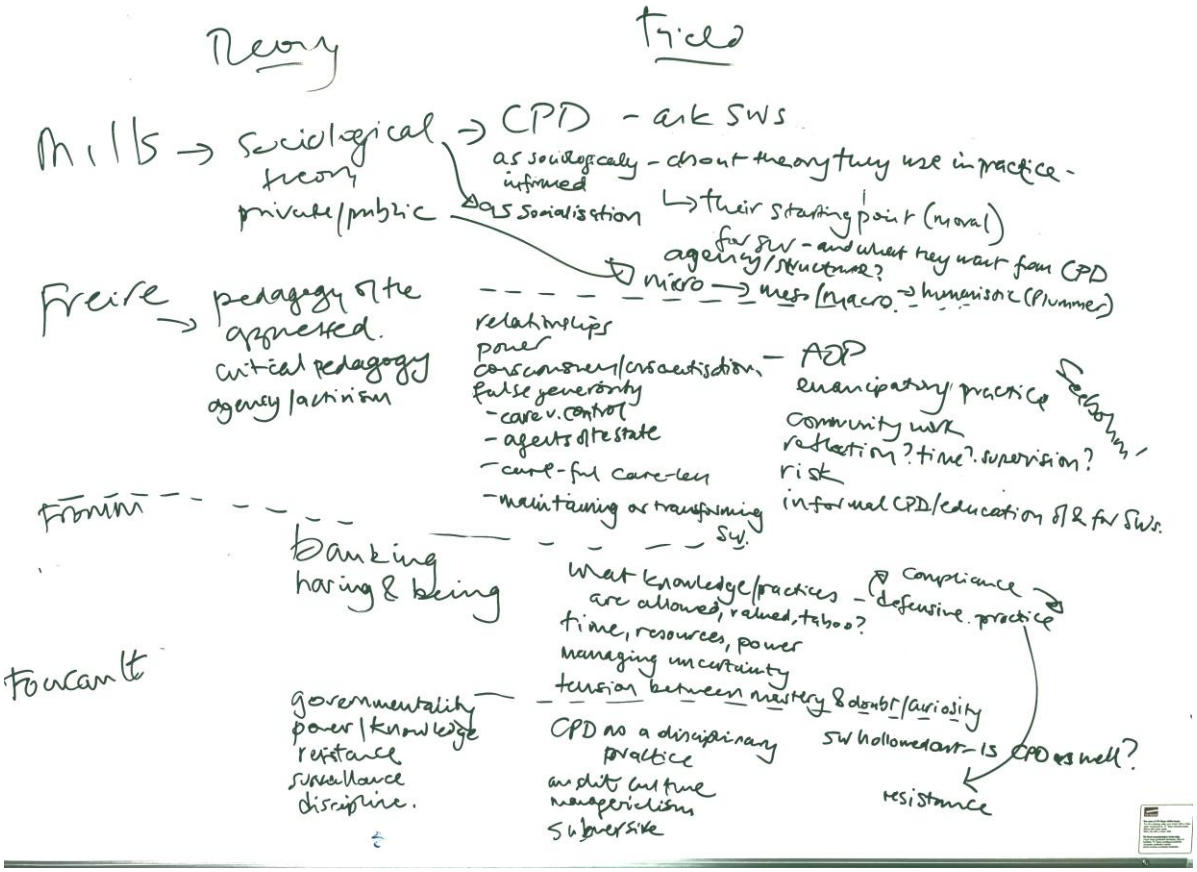
Appendix 2: Visual Presentation of Four Theorists

Theoretical Framework – Philosophical Ideas and Stances



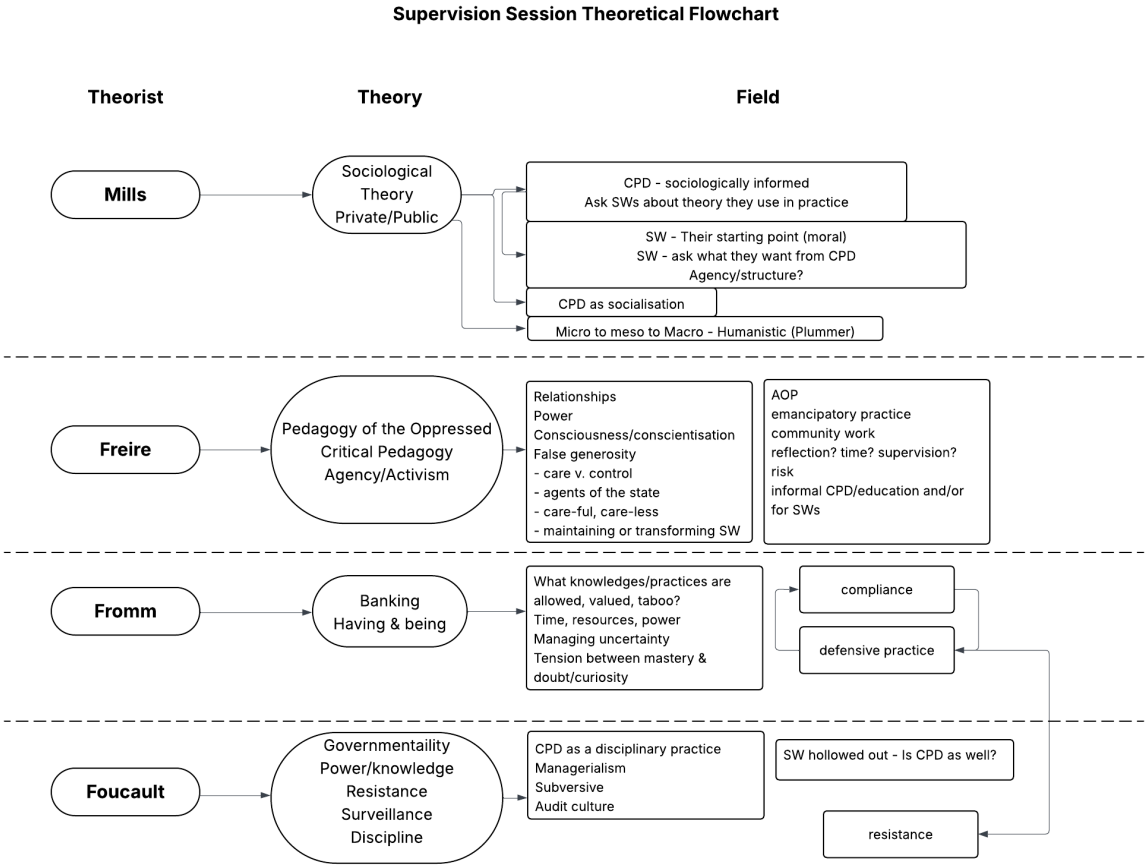
Appendix 3:

Supervision Session Theoretical Flowchart (Whiteboard Example)



Appendix 4:

Supervision Session Theoretical Flowchart Diagram



Appendix 5:

Approval Letter for Research Ethics from Brunel University, London

College of Business, Arts and
Social Sciences Research Ethics
Committee
Brunel University London
Kingston Lane
Uxbridge
UB8 3PH
United Kingdom
www.brunel.ac.uk

7 January 2021

LETTER OF APPROVAL

APPROVAL HAS BEEN GRANTED FOR THIS STUDY TO BE CARRIED OUT BETWEEN 07/01/2021 AND 31/08/2022

Applicant (s): Mrs Ann Dale-Emberton

Project Title: How do Social Workers engage with Continuing Professional Development to sustain and develop their practice and professional identity?

Reference: 26260-LR-Dec/2020- 29310-1

Dear Mrs Ann Dale-Emberton

The Research Ethics Committee has considered the above application recently submitted by you.

The Chair, acting under delegated authority has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. Approval is given on the understanding that the conditions of approval set out below are followed:

- **Approval is given for remote (online/telephone) research activity only. Face-to-face activity and/or travel will require approval by way of an amendment.**
- **The agreed protocol must be followed. Any changes to the protocol will require prior approval from the Committee by way of an application for an amendment.**
- In addition to the above, please ensure that you monitor and adhere to all up-to-date local and national Government health advice for the duration of your project.

Please note that:

- Research Participant Information Sheets and (where relevant) flyers, posters, and consent forms should include a clear statement that research ethics approval has been obtained from the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- The Research Participant Information Sheets should include a clear statement that queries should be directed, in the first instance, to the Supervisor (where relevant), or the researcher. Complaints, on the other hand, should be directed, in the first instance, to the Chair of the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- Approval to proceed with the study is granted subject to receipt by the Committee of satisfactory responses to any conditions that may appear above, in addition to any subsequent changes to the protocol.
- The Research Ethics Committee reserves the right to sample and review documentation, including raw data, relevant to the study.

- You may not undertake any research activity if you are not a registered student at Brunel University or if you cease to become registered, including abeyance or temporary withdrawal. As a deregistered student you would not be insured to undertake research activity. Research activity includes the recruitment of participants, undertaking consent procedures and collection of data. Breach of this requirement constitutes research misconduct and is a disciplinary offence.

Professor David Gallear

Chair of the College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Brunel University London.

Appendix 6: Participant Information Sheet

Education Department,
College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences

Participation Information Sheet

Research Study:

How do Social Workers navigate Continuing Professional Development to sustain and develop their practice and professional identity?

Invitation Paragraph

You are being asked to take part in a research study I am undertaking. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what will be involved. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss with others if you wish. If anything is not clear, or you would like further information please feel free to contact me. Please take time to decide whether or not you wish to participate. Thank you for reading this information.

What is the purpose of the study?

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has been a feature of post qualification social work practice for many years in order to develop one's knowledge and skills, as well as develop specialist knowledge. Until 2002 this was on a voluntary basis, but social workers are now each year required by Social Work England to evidence CPD each year in order to re-register and retain the right to continue to practise.

The aim of the study is to explore with qualified social workers how they engage with CPD to sustain and develop their practice and professional identity. My interest in this aspect of social work practice stems from over forty years' experience as a qualified social worker in probation, social work, and social work education. The study sets out to hear the unique perspectives of practitioners in what they want from CPD, the personal benefits, challenges, and organisational barriers they may experience and how they negotiate their way through these to maintain their personal development and meet their career aspirations.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate as you are a qualified social work practitioner.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary, and it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information to keep and you will be asked to sign a consent form to confirm your participation. If you decide to

take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time up until the end of June 2021 when start of analysis will comment and are not required to give any reason for withdrawal.

Following interviews data will be anonymised and transcribed but once the data has been anonymised and analysed it will not be possible to withdraw from the study.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to be part of the study I will arrange, via email, a mutually agreeable date and time to meet on-line for an interview. Interviews will last for approximately 1 to 1.5 hours and will take place via Zoom, Teams, Skype, telephone, or another video-recording system agreed between us. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Participants' interviews will be given a pseudonym in order to preserve anonymity. All data collected will be kept in a secure place, i.e. locked safe and my encrypted /password protected drive at Brunel University London. Only the transcriber, my PhD supervisors and I will have access to these data. The data will be kept for five years. Data will be kept in accordance with the Brunel University Data Storage Policy and destroyed after this time in accordance with the policy.

The results may be published in academic journals and other written formats and/or presented at academic conferences.

Are there any lifestyle restrictions?

There are no lifestyle restrictions. However, access to a desktop/laptop or mobile phone is required in order to undertake the interviews will be necessary. In order to preserve confidentiality, it would be helpful if participants could arrange to have access to a room or space where they can speak freely and without interruptions.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no anticipated disadvantages or risks associated with undertaking part in the study, though talking about your career as a social worker in an interview might give rise to particular thoughts and feelings.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There are no particular benefits for you, beyond the opportunity to reflect on and discuss your experience of CPD as part of your career in social work. However, by taking part in the research study you will have a unique opportunity for your voice, perspectives, and experiences of practice to be heard and highlighted. This will contribute to the understanding of the context and management of continuing professional development in social work in England.

What if something goes wrong?

As far as it is discernible there are no physical or psychological risks associated with taking part in the study, although if any of the subject area raises psychological distress for participants the interview can be paused or terminated if the participant

does not wish to continue. All participants will be provided with information about sources of support in case they want to follow up after the interview.

If the participant wishes to complain about any aspect of the experience they should contact the College of Business, Arts and Social Science Research Ethics Committee Chair - Professor David Gallear - (David.Gallear@brunel.ac.uk

Will I be recorded, and how will the recording be used?

Interviews will be recorded digitally, downloaded, and transcribed. All data will be anonymised, and participants' interviews will be given a pseudonym in order to preserve anonymity. Anonymised excerpts from the interviews may be quoted in my doctoral thesis, at academic conferences and in written pieces for academic journals and other publications. No participants will be identified or identifiable from these excerpts.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Recordings will be encrypted, names anonymised by using a pseudonym or code. However, if during the course of the research evidence of harm or misconduct come to light, then it may be necessary to break confidentiality. If this occurred, I would advise you or others at the time if I needed to do this and let you know what will happen next.

The interviews will be transcribed by myself or transcriber, who will be subject to a confidentiality statement. They will be reviewed by my PhD supervisors, Dr. Anne Chappell, and Dr. Mike Thomas. Recordings will be kept on an encrypted USB, kept securely in a locked safe until transferred to secure electronic storage on the university system in accordance with Brunel Data Storage Policy.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results will be written up as part of my PhD thesis. All information provided by participants will be anonymised and no participant will be identified in the thesis or any other report or publication unless the participant specifically requests me to use their comments and attribute them to them.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is being organised by Ann Dale-Emberton in conjunction with Brunel University London.

What are the indemnity arrangements?

Brunel University London provides appropriate insurance cover for research which has received ethical approval.

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has been reviewed and approved by Brunel University London Research Ethics Committee – College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee Chair – Professor David Gallear (David.Gallear@brunel.ac.uk).

Research integrity

Brunel University London is committed to compliance with the Universities UK Research Integrity Concordat. You are entitled to expect the highest level of integrity from our researchers during the course of their research.

Contact and further information and complaints

In the first instance, this should be my PhD supervisor: Dr. Anne Chappell, anne.chappell@brunel.ac.uk Telephone Number: 01895-266497

Or

Chair of College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee: Professor David Gallear (David.Gallear@brunel.ac.uk)

Researcher:

Ann Dale-Emberton
ann.dale-emberton@brunel.ac.uk

If you have any questions or require any clarification concerning the study or participation, please feel free to contact me

Thank you for taking time to read this information.

Appendix 7: Participants' Consent Form

College of Business, Art, and Social Sciences
Department of Education

Research Study:
How do Social Workers navigate Continuing Professional Development to sustain and develop their practice and professional identify?

CONSENT FORM

Approval has been granted for this study to be carried out between January and July 2021

The participant should complete the whole of this sheet.		
	YES	NO
Have you read the Participant Information Sheet?	☐	☐
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? (via email/phone)	☐	☐
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? (via email/phone)	☐	☐
Have you spoken to anyone about the study?		
Do you understand that you will not be referred to by name in any report concerning this study?	☐	☐
Do you agree that your anonymised data will be used not only in this study but may also be used by future researchers?	☐	☐
Do you understand that:		
• You are free to withdraw from this study at any time	☐	☐
• You do not have to give any reason for withdrawing	☐	☐
• You can withdraw your data any time up to the end of June 2021	☐	☐
I agree to the use of non-attributable quotes when the study is written up or published	☐	☐
The procedures regarding confidentiality have been explained to me	☐	☐
I agree to take part in this study.	☐	☐

Signature of research participant:	
Print name:	Date:
Researcher Name:	
Print Name:	Date:

Appendix 8: Participants' Profile Information Form

Participant Profile – Request for Pre-Interview Information:

Name: …… **Code/Pseudonym: ……**

Gender Male ( ) Female ( ) Non-binary ( )

Prefer not to say ( )

Age Profile

21- 25 ( ) 26 - 29 ( ) 30 - 35 ( ) 36 - 40 ( ) 41- 45 ( )

46 - 50 ( ) 51- 54 ( ) 55 - 59 ( ) 60 - 64 ( ) 65 -70 ( )

Prefer not to say ( )

Ethnicity – How would you describe your ethnic and cultural background?

White British ( ) White Irish ( ) White English ( )

White Scottish ( ) White Welsh ( ) White Other ( )

Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi ( )

Asian or Asian British - Indian ( )

Asian or Asian British – Pakistani ( )

Other Asian Background ( )

Black or Black British – African ( ) Black or Black British -Caribbean ( )

Other Black Background ( )

Mixed – White & Asian ( ) Mixed – White & Black African ( )

Mixed – White & Black Caribbean ( ) Other Mixed background ( )

Prefer not to say ( )

Do you have a disability?

Yes ( ) No ( )

Agency/Organisation

Statutory ( ) Voluntary ( ) Independent ( ) Private ( )

Social Work Qualification

UK Degree ( ) Masters' Degree ( ) Frontline ( ) Think Ahead ( )

Step-Up ( ) DipSW ( ) CQSW ( ) CSS ( )

HO Letter Recognition ( ) Degree attained outside UK ( )

Other Social Work Qualification ( )

Post-Qualifying Qualification Awards

PQ1 Certificate ( ) Practice Teaching CCETSW ( )

PQ Child Care ( ) PQ Mental Health ( )

PQ Adults ( ) ASYE ( ) Other ( )

PEPS (1) ( ) PEPS 2 ( ) AMHP ( )

How long have you been qualified?

Less than a year ( ) 1 - 4 years ( ) 5 – 9 years ( )

10 – 15 years ( ) 16 – 20 years ( ) 21- 25 years ( )

26 – 30 years ( ) Over 30 years ( )

What is your current role?

…….

Do you work full-time or part-time?

…….

How long have you been in this position?

……..

Have you worked in any other areas?

……..

If so, what are these?

……..

Do you have any responsibilities as a carer either to children or adult?

……

Appendix 9: Flyer and Information for Prospective Participants

Dear Social Work Colleague,

My name is Ann Dale-Emberton. I am a social worker and doctoral researcher currently undertaking a PhD in Education at Brunel University London. The focus of my research is: Continuing Professional Development Social Worker or Organisational Led: Whose Choice? I want to find out how social workers engage with Continuing Professional Development to sustain and develop their practice and professional identity.

I am inviting social work practitioners across England to take part in an online interview with me so that I can hear the unique perspectives of practitioners in what they want from CPD, the personal challenges and organisational barriers they may experience, and how they negotiate their way through these to maintain their personal development and meet their career aspirations.

The aim is to recruit around 20-25 participants, with a spread of ages, genders, ethnicities, at different stages of their careers. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed and analysis of the data will inform and shape future policy on how CPD for social workers can be managed effectively in order to be a positive, empowering experience, enabling them to practise effectively.

Participation is completely voluntary and if you decide to take part you may withdraw from the study at any time. There will be no identifying information used in the research study report by yourself, and no information will be used that could identify your organisation. I would very much welcome and appreciate your participation in my research study.

If you are willing to take part in the study, I would be happy to send you information that gives further details. Please email me on the below link.

Thank you for taking time to read this information, I look forward to hearing from you. If you know of anyone else who might be interested in taking part, please feel free to pass on this information.

Kind regards

Ann

Ann Dale-Emberton
Doctoral Researcher

ann.dale-emberton@brunel.ac.uk

Appendix 10: Guidance for Transcriber Confidentiality Statement

How do Social Workers navigate Continuing Professional Development to sustain and develop their practice and professional development?

This confidentiality Statement has been provided to you as part of ensuring that throughout the transcription of the data provided, the confidentiality of the students, as well as others will be maintained at all times.

Please do take the time to read and consider each statement carefully and indicate your agreement by ticking the individual boxes and then sign and date the form accordingly. You will be asked for the completed Confidentiality Statement by the researcher before the process of transcription begins.

If you have any questions in relation to this document, please contact Ann Dale-Emberton either on 0771705497 or email ann.dale-emberton@brunel.ac.uk

☐ I understand that by signing the Transcriber Confidentiality Statement I am respecting all participants' right to confidentiality.

☐ I understand that by signing the Transcriber Confidentiality Statement I will, at all times, ensure that the digital recordings and the transcripts produced will be kept securely until sent to the researcher.

☐ I understand that by signing the Transcriber Confidentiality Statement I am confirming that the contents of the digital recordings will not be discussed with anyone other than the researcher

Signature: ……Date…….

Name: (Please Print) ……...

Appendix 11: Interview Schedule Guidance

How to Social Workers navigate Continuing Professional Development to sustain and develop their practice and professional identity?

Introductory comments

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research, I appreciate you giving up your time when you have so many demands. Thank you for completing the Participation and Consent Forms, as well as the personal profile, this is very helpful I just want to reiterate that participation is voluntary. Have you any questions you would like to ask before we start?

I look forward to sharing results with you on completion of the research study, hopefully in 2022.

The interview is being recorded, and material will be heard by myself, transcriber, if used, as well as my PhD supervisors. All material will be kept confidential as per the consent agreement. However, if during the course of the research evidence of harm or misconduct come to light, then it may be necessary to break confidentiality in accordance with the codes of social work. I would tell you or others at the time if I need to do this and let you know what will happen next.

Date: ……. Time: …….

Name and Job Title: ……

Agency/County/Unitary: …….

Statutory/Voluntary/Independent: ……

Adults/Children: ……

Code/Pseudonym Name: …….

- The interview should take between 1 and 1½ hours.
- I am interested in hearing your views about Continuing Professional Development (CPD) since becoming a social worker. However, I have some key issues that I hope we will cover, so I will occasionally check my prompts to see if these have been covered.

(a) Explore understanding of CPD
(b) What does CPD mean for social workers?
(c) Your understanding of your role as social worker and CPD.
(d) What is the importance of CPD to you as a social worker?
(e) How does CPD enhance your practice?
(f) Who decides what CPD social workers undertake?
(g) What are the significant factors that enable you as social worker to maintain your professional identity?

Q.1 Can you tell me about your social worker career/journey (?) to date?

Prompts to further discussion:

(a) Can you tell me what influenced you to go into social work?
(b) What has been your learning career in social work?
(c) Has CPD has contributed to career development, i.e. post-qualifications, career progression? (ASYE; Consolidation Programme; PQ; PEPS 1 & 2, Degree; any other recognised qualification, e.g. family therapy, systemic practice, motivational interviewing, solution-focused practice, PG Research?) If yes to any,
(d) Can you tell me more about these opportunities?
(e) Have there been any developmental opportunities you would like to have accessed to promote your career or practice?
(f) If yes to above question - Was there any reason why you could not participate in these?

Q.2 What is your understanding of CPD ?

Prompts:

(a) Can you give me any examples of CPD that you consider has benefited your practice?
(b) Have you any examples of CPD sessions which you consider were a waste of your time? Explore in more depth
(c) What sort of activities, learning would you include or exclude?
(d) Do you see any problems/issues with CPD as it stands?
(e) What do you think are the implications for social workers regarding the current audit by Social Work England?

Q.3 Thinking about the challenges and changes in practice, how much CPD that you undertake is self-initiated and how much is a requirement?

Prompts to further discussion:

(a) Who decides what CPD you undertake? How is this communicated to you?
(b) How active are you in CPD?
(c) How accessible is training in your organisation?
(d) Are there any barriers you have encountered to participating (i.e. not being selected by the organisation for a training programme, lack of funding, care responsibilities, no study leave). Ask if they can expand on why they are not able to participate in CPD.
(e) Do you get study leave allocated each year? If so, are there any conditions attached to this?

Q.4 What is the importance of CPD opportunities to you as a social worker?

Prompts to further discussion:

(a) What opportunities are there available within the organisation to consolidate and build on your practice?
(b) How do you develop new knowledge and skills?
(c) Does your supervision link to CPD? Can you give me some examples?
(d) Evidencing CPD to Social Work England as the regulator to practise?
(e) Any others?

Q.5 What types of CPD opportunities are on offer within your organisation?

Prompts to further discussion:

(a) Updating of Law, Policies, Procedures for the organisation to meet their statutory requirements?
(b) Is attendance obligatory?
(c) Is your engagement monitored in any way?
(d) Induction?
(e) Mandatory Training to meet new models of working, i.e. Strengths-Based Approach (Adult & Children), Signs of Safety, Strengthening Families, Recovery Model, Three Conversations, Motivational Interviewing, Solution-Focused Practice?
(f) Are these in-house provisions or external to organisation?
(g) Are these funded by the organisation?
(h) Have you funded any of your own CPD?
(i) Academy Training Opportunities?
(j) Communities of Practice?
(k) Learning organisation culture?
(l) How are new social work research, policies and procedures cascaded down in your agency?
(m) Peer observation/peer mentoring/peer learning?
(n) Reflective Supervision Sessions?

Q.6 Do you consider that austerity and Covid 19 pandemic have affected CPD opportunities in your organisation?
If yes, can you give me some examples?

Q.7 Do you consider there are any gaps in the CPD framework and provision?

Prompts to further discussion:

(a) Can you tell me something about these areas?
(b) What would be on your ‘wish list’ in relation to CPD? List of examples?
(c) Can you give me some examples of how you would like to see CPD to be organised?

Q.8 Reflecting on your experience of CPD what has its impact been on your practice?

Prompts to further discussion:

(a) How do you keep up to date with new practice-based knowledge and research around evidence-based practice?
(b) How do you evaluate your learning?

i. Feedback from supervisor or service-users?
ii. Annual Appraisal?
iii. Management Feedback?
iv. OFSTED or Care Quality Commission reports/feedback?
v. Have you had an opportunity to participate in social work research within your organisation?

Q.9 How does CPD link to your professional identity as a social worker?

Prompts to further discussion:

(a) How important is it for social work to have a professional identity?
(b) How important is it to you to be able to demonstrate that your practise is underpinned by evidencing that you adhere to ethical, social justice and human rights principles?
(c) Do you use the Global Definition of International Social Work (2014) as a benchmark to gauge practice ethics, values, and knowledge? (Copy of Global Definition of International Social Work 2014 – screen shared?).
(d) Do you use the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) Domains as a benchmark and integrate these into practice? (Copy of PCF Domains for social workers – screen shared?).
(e) How useful is the BASW Code of Ethics for Social Workers (2014) to you in practice? (The principles on which the profession is based). (Copy of BASW Code of Ethics for Social Workers (2014) document – screen shared?)
(f) Have you been able to develop knowledge of social work standard requirements provided by Social Work England (2019)?
(g) How confident would you say you are about practice requirements for practising social workers in terms of social work knowledge base, underpinning theories (social work and social science), skills, and attributes that are required to demonstrate capability in social work practice?

Thank you, for you for the helpful interview and your time. I do appreciate this and it is all going to be very helpful to my research.

Finally**,** is there anything else you would like to add, for instance, especially whether there you consider there is anything key that makes a difference to you in respect of your continuing professional development?

If following this interview, you think of anything else you would like to contribute please contact me by email with your comments or alternatively let me know of a timeframe and I would be happy to speak with you by telephone if you prefer.

If you do have any concerns as a reminder my supervisor, Dr. Anne Chappell can be contacted on: anne.chappell@brunel.ac.uk

I will let you know when the research is finalised and I can send you a summary of findings which I am planning to prepare. As I am undertaking a snowball sampling method if there is any colleague who would like to participate, please pass on information about the research and my details.

Appendix 12: Participants in Study Profiles

Demographic Information

All names have been anonymised and each participant given a pseudonym

Pseudonym	Rob
Gender	Male
Age-Range	60+
Disability	Yes
Ethnicity	White British
Social Work Qualification	CQSW
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	CCETSW PE Award: AMHP
Practice Experience	25 years
Current Role	Head of Forensic Social Work
Agency/Organisation	Private Sector - Adults

Pseudonym	Lucy
Gender	Female
Age-Range	41-45
Disability	No
Ethnicity	White British
Social Work Qualification	BSc Honours in Social Work
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	PEPS 1 & 2
Practice Experience	7 years
Current Role	Assistant Team Manager
Agency/Organisation	Local Authority – Child Care

Pseudonym	Elsie
Gender	Female
Age-Range	36-40
Disability	No
Ethnicity	White British
Social Work Qualification	BA Honours in Social Work
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	PEPS 1 & 2; PSDP
Practice Experience	10 years
Current Role	Assistant Team Manager
Agency/Organisation	Local Authority – Child Care

Pseudonym	Derek
Gender	Male
Age-Range	46-50
Disability	No
Ethnicity	White British
Social Work Qualification	BSc in Social Work
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	ASYE; PEPs 1 & 2; Systemic Practice
Practice Experience	9 years

Current Role	Senior Practitioner
Agency/Organisation	Local Authority – Child Care

Pseudonym	Stewart
Gender	Male
Age-Range	55-59
Disability	No
Ethnicity	White British
Social Work Qualification	BA in Social Work
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	PQ 1; CCETSW PT Award; M.A., Management Certificate
Practice Experience	30 years
Current Role	Team Manager
Agency/Organisation	Local Authority – Child Care

Pseudonym	Melissa
Gender	Female
Age-Range	30-35
Disability	No
Ethnicity	White - EU
Social Work Qualification	MSc in Social Work
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	ASYE; PEPS 1
Practice Experience	6 years
Current Role	Team Manager
Agency/Organisation	Local Authority – Adult Services

Pseudonym	Debra
Gender	Female
Age-Range	36-40
Disability	Yes
Ethnicity	White British
Social Work Qualification	MSc in Social Work
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	ASYE; Best Interest Assessor
Practice Experience	5 years
Current Role	Social Worker
Agency/Organisation	Local Authority - Adult Services

Pseudonym	Lara
Gender	Female
Age-Range	46-50
Disability	No
Ethnicity	White British
Social Work Qualification	BSc Honours in Social Work
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	ASYE
Practice Experience	6 years
Current Role	Team Manager
Agency/Organisation	Local Authority – Child Care

Pseudonym	Cath
Gender	Female
Age-Range	51-54
Disability	Yes
Ethnicity	White Irish
Social Work Qualification	Dip SW
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	PQ1; PEPS 1 & 2; Generic Management Programme
Practice Experience	24 years
Current Role	Service Manager
Agency/Organisation	Local Authority – Child Care

Pseudonym	Cassie
Gender	Female
Age-Range	30-35
Disability	No
Ethnicity	White British
Social Work Qualification	PGDip in SW (Step-Up)
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	ASYE; PEPS 1; PSDP
Practice Experience	8 years
Current Role	Assistant Team Manager
Agency/Organisation	Local Authority – Child Care

Pseudonym	Zara
Gender	Female
Age-Range	41-45
Disability	No
Ethnicity	British Asian
Social Work Qualification	BSc Honours in Social Work
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	ASYE
Practice Experience	6 years
Current Role	Senior Social Worker
Agency/Organisation	Local Authority – Child Care

Pseudonym	Naomi
Gender	Female
Age-Range	36-40
Disability	No
Ethnicity	White British
Social Work Qualification	BA Honours in Social Work
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	PEPS 1 & 2; PQ Mental Health; AMHP; Best Interest Assessor
Practice Experience	14 years
Current Role	Team Manager & AMHP
Agency/Organisation	NHS – Adult Mental Health

Pseudonym	Vera
Gender	Female
Age-Range	41-45
Disability	No
Ethnicity	White British
Social Work Qualification	PG Dip SW
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	PQ – Adults; PEPS 1 & 2; Best Interest Assessor
Practice Experience	18 years
Current Role	Senior Social Worker
Agency/Organisation	Local Authority - Adults

Pseudonym	Seb
Gender	Male
Age-Range	46-50
Disability	No
Ethnicity	Black African
Social Work Qualification	MSc in Social Work
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	PQ1; PEPS 1; Best Interest Assessor
Practice Experience	7 years
Current Role	Senior Social Work Practitioner
Agency/Organisation	Local Authority - Adults

Pseudonym	Jessi
Gender	Female
Age-Range	60 +
Disability	No
Ethnicity	White British
Social Work Qualification	BA in Social Work/CQSW
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	MSc in Child Care; CCETSW PT
Practice Experience	30 years +
Current Role	Independent Social Worker
Agency/Organisation	Self-Employed

Pseudonym	Tom
Gender	Male
Age-Range	41-45
Disability	No
Ethnicity	Black African
Social Work Qualification	BA Honours in Social Work
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	ASYE; PQ Adults; PEPS 1 & 2: Best Interest Assessor
Practice Experience	7 years
Current Role	Senior Social Worker
Agency/Organisation	Local Authority - Adults

Pseudonym	Milli
Gender	Female
Age-Range	55-59
Disability	No
Ethnicity	White British Welsh
Social Work Qualification	BA Honours in Social Work
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	PQ1; PEPs1
Practice Experience	15 years
Current Role	Deputy Team Manager
Agency/Organisation	Local Authority – Child Care

Pseudonym	Sara
Gender	Female
Age-Range	30-35
Disability	No
Ethnicity	White British
Social Work Qualification	PGDip in SW (Step-Up)
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	ASYE; PEPS1
Practice Experience	6 years
Current Role	Senior Social Worker
Agency/Organisation	Local Authority – Child Care

Pseudonym	Adam
Gender	Male
Age-Range	30-35
Disability	No
Ethnicity	White British
Social Work Qualification	BA Honours in Social Work
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	ASYE; PEPs 1 & 2; Family Therapy Diploma First Year
Practice Experience	11 years
Current Role	Deputy Team Manager
Agency/Organisation	Local Authority – Child Care

Pseudonym	Dave
Gender	Male
Age-Range	60+
Disability	No
Ethnicity	White British
Social Work Qualification	MA in Social Work
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	CCETSW PT Award;
Practice Experience	30 + years
Current Role	Independent Social Worker/Assessor/Tutor
Agency/Organisation	Self-Employed

Pseudonym	Elsa
Gender	Female
Age-Range	30-35
Disability	No
Ethnicity	Mixed Race – White & Asian
Social Work Qualification	PGDip in SW (Step-Up)
Post-Qualifying Qualifications	ASYE; Systemic Practice
Practice Experience	8 years
Current Role	Senior Practitioner/Lecturer
Agency/Organisation	

Appendix 13: Example of Coding
Participant: Stewart **Codes (1)**
Q2. What is your understanding of CPD

It's I mean social work is a profession, you've got to belong to a professional body and being part of belonging to any professional body is about making sure that you are performing at a certain level and part of that is your continuing your professional development.	Profession
For instance, your understanding of current issues, making sure that recent research and theory enter your practice. That you are reflective in how you practice and how you assimilate these new methods into how you work. So, I guess that's and it's about keeping on learning - it's not just about like working in a supermarket where you basically you know you go in and you can almost like be going through the motions and switch off. Whatever you do in CPD it's about developing new skills and keeping that going throughout the time you are practising.	Responsibility of social worker to undertake CPD Reflective Practice skills. Commitment to learning and updating skills.
Yes, the main thing is there's different ways of doing it. And one way you know is to attend lots of training courses and can make sure you're focusing on the training courses which are helpful.	CPD can be undertaken in variety of ways.
But I think there's other ways of doing that, as well. Another way is around reading; it's around thinking about things, not just reading documents but thinking about how you're bringing those into your practice. Um supervision is another area, which is good in terms of making sure you're developing as a social worker so in terms of bouncing ideas off your supervision. I think um for me there's also a particular role being as a team manager of developing or you know, in some ways, responsible for some of the learning for my supervises. Yeah, that's also an important part, which is in a sense, this is also part of my learning as well, so it's like a good thing. I don't know whether that makes sense.	Onus on social worker to find and engage in courses. Manager has dual role re CPD. Supervision
Yes, I think so um I mean I would make one or two points. I think that, in terms of the formal learning opportunities for more experienced workers they seem to decrease and you've got to look further afield, for them. And for example, you have an awful lot of safeguarding courses, and that's very good for newly qualified social workers. But as you become more experienced there are not advanced, appropriate courses available. They sort of diminish, so you've got to be more inventive, but I am a firm believer in that actually.	Less opportunities for more experienced social work practitioners More opportunities for less-experienced social workers

You need to give some focus to your own learning, and so one of the things that I'm very keen to do at the moment, is setting aside some time to read some documents, and, I think, for example, Community Care Inform, is a good example and, actually, reading an article and then, in a sense, analysing it. What you get from that in terms of your own role and how you can implement it; how you can draw things out from that to improve your practice, so that's something that I'm very keen on doing at the moment.	Compliance CPD self-initiated
No, there are very few courses where people are pushed onto them. And I certainly really do like training, I enjoy it. So, I think that it's very unlikely I would do a training course and think gosh that was complete waste of time, why am I doing that because I think you can get pretty well get something from any training course. There are, I mean it's interesting because one of the training courses, I'm sort of doing at the moment is we do these action learning sets for team managers. All the team managers come together, and we have a topic which we discuss, and you know, you could say gosh I haven't time to do this as there are so many other things to do, but actually you know I get a lot from it. And we then talk about dilemmas and issues like that and that's something we do have you know, a lot of dilemmas in our work as managers, and we talk through these and it helps to resolve them.	Enjoys Collaborative peer approach positive experience Training more interactive/creative Problem-Solving
Yes, that's very, very useful it's a very sort of not your rigid sort of courses, where you know there is a fixed topic and somebody just sort of spends two hours talking to you about the latest theory and it's just like being in a you know back at school where you are very much not that engaged.	Passive learning
You know this one, for example, I think more training courses nowadays are much more interactive. So, in a sense, you must bear some responsibility yourself for making them successful. If you say, can you help me with this? I am interested in this. It is not appropriate to say I didn't get much from that because the onus is also on you to actually give a little bit too. Well, that's how I like to engage. I think that as a social worker; do you want me to talk about social workers in general or myself or anything else?	Onus on SWs to engage in process. Self-initiated Self-responsibility
As an example, um I think, personally I think I'm happy to submit very many pieces of evidence, and I know you don't have to you submit very many pieces of evidence, but I must admit I've got into the habit of uploading pieces of evidence on a regular basis, and they really come from two areas. One is reading something like Community Care Inform and then reflecting on it. And, and the other is training courses I've been on and reflecting on what I got out of those and make sense of it. I think that Social Work England has needed me to do this, and it has helped me to have a little bit of discipline to do that. So, I think that's been useful. I know that	Happy to submit many pieces of evidence. Choice of what submitted as CPD. Needs prioritising.

previously with HCPC I think it was very much you know you knew what you had to do, and certainly I made sure I did I went to enough training courses, but this is quite different. But changing that wasn't really a difficulty because working you know, in a statutory body, you know there's always training courses you have to do, and you do far more. And, in a sense, and I think I probably did slightly less than I do now, but I do like the way that Social Work England has done this. In a sense it's very easy to just put something up on there and actually you know you can look at all the documents that you've uploaded. You actually can go back to them. It makes sense and a way of arranging some of these documents that you've done.	SWE preferred to HCPC method SWE requirement needs disciplined approach.
I think, certainly the last year, I've done well over 10 and am happy with what I do. As I have spoken with other social work when we recently had the deadline there was a bit of a mad rush by social workers to get something uploaded because they knew if they didn't, they would you know potentially be in trouble. In a sense that worries me because it's clearly not doing what it's meant to do. This is a shame because I do think that social workers are very, very, busy, but saying that it's really helpful and I certainly find it helpful to put aside not necessarily that much time but just to even just do it once a month, just do something which is relevant to your job. But if it's slightly more academic even if it's only, say an article from Community Care Inform which you read; it might only be about three or four pages and just looking at that I think on how you can show for instance, what are the relevant points from the article in terms of your role is helpful. I find this is a very useful process and I'm sure social workers in my team may also. However, there are social workers who do not think in those terms and there is a mad scramble. I think this is a shame because I think it is important for your development and need to keep it up, not to ignore that side of your role and especially in terms of your ongoing development. The last-minute scramble is not good, because it often means that people are doing the bare minimum. It was a problem when with HCPC and, actually, if they were one of the 5 or 6% that got selected, I am not sure how they would be affected by lack of evidence.	Some SWs do bare minimum which they consider affects their development. Some SWs resistant Mindset important Professional development important Some SWs do not prioritise attending or evidencing CPD.
No, our organisation does not give any time to do CPD or study days in the year, no nothing like that. However, if one of my social workers in the team asked if they could have time to do this training and wrap up things I would always ensure they had it, I would not object, but it is not allocated normally.	No study leave given by organisation.

Appendix 14: Example of Preliminary Codes and Themes

Q. 2 What is your understanding of CPD?

Participant: Stewart

Codes	Themes
SW a profession	Profession
Responsibility of SW to undertake CPD & keep abreast of changes and assimilate into practice	Professional Responsibility
Important professionals are reflective and committed to learning	Reflective skills
CPD can be undertaken in variety of ways	Varity of tasks count as CPD
Manager being SW has dual role re CPD	Management responsibilities
	Supervision
Supervision can be used by supervisees to help SWs to bounce ideas re CPD and their learning	Self-determining
Less CPD opportunities around for more experienced social work practitioners	Seniority CPD overlooked
Onus on practitioners to seek out opportunities. Need to be inventive	Self-responsibility
For newly qualified there is good range of CPD	Training more geared to inexperienced social workers
Experienced practitioners need to look further afield for CPD	Opportunities lessen for more experienced social workers
Training positive experience	Training positive
Peer group learning positive experience	Self-responsibility
Group collaborative approach	Collaborative peer approach positive
Current group approach relevant to role	Self-responsibility
Group training interactive	
Social workers must take self-responsibility for their own CPD training	Collaborative approach
Onus on SWs to engage in course and material	Self-responsibility
Feels current group more useful – likes collaborative approach rather than top-down approach (Freire)	Involvement /engagement
Training has become more interactive over the years	Collaborative
SWs must bear some responsibility themselves for CPD to make it successful	Self-initiated/ Self-responsibility
Happy to submit many pieces of evidence	Evidence/compliance
Submits over and above what is required by SWE	SWE requirement helpful
Uses variety of CPD methods as evidence	Varied CPD
SWE helped him to have a more disciplined approach to CPD	Self-discipline
HCPC about quantity not quality	SWE approach more clarity
LA provides variety of training programmes	Choice of CPD Opportunities
Likes SWE approach – it is easier	
Uploaded ten pieces of evidence	SWE uploading process easy and can be reviewed
Concerned that some SWs must rush to upload CPD before deadline – some do the minimum	Not prioritising
Found it helpful to put aside time to do CPD & upload	Prioritising
Feels if professional – important to do both, e.g. job and CPD development	Professionalism

Some SWs do bare minimum which he considers affects their development	Resistant social workers
No study leave	No Study Leave
No study leave, or formal time given by organisation to undertake CPD	Time/pressure on time
If one of his SWs struggling would give them time to wrap up CPD	Negotiating

Appendix 15:

Brunel University Conference Poster
Dissemination of Information about the Study

Brunel University London

Continuing Professional Development: Social Worker or Organisational Led. Whose Choice?
PhD in Education – July 2022 Conference, Brunel University

Ann Dale-Emberton
PhD Supervisors: Dr. Anne Chappell and Dr. Mike Thomas

Abstract

My thesis explores Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for social workers, a statutory requirement since 2001 to maintain registration to practise. Primary research conducted in England with twenty social work practitioners diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, and points in their careers. The research sits within an interpretivist paradigm, using semi-structured narrative interviews that capture the voices and lived experiences of participants. Interviews were conducted during the disruptive and challenging times of the Covid 19 pandemic. CPD shifted from face-to-face methods to what Lobe, Morgan and Hoffman (2020, p.1) describe as a "ever changing technological landscape". This poster draws from thematic analysis of data, highlighting participants' views, juggling responsibilities to provide interventions with service users. The findings link to the theoretical framework that is underpinned by the ideas of Mills (1959), Freire (1970), Fromm (1976) and Foucault (1977) illustrating that CPD without study time is yet another organisational pressure.

Questions

How do social workers engage with CPD to sustain and develop their practice and professional identity?
What is CPD for social workers?
Who decides?
How do social workers understand CPD and their role?
What is importance of CPD to individual social workers?

Preliminary Research Findings

- CPD seen as Professional Responsibility by social workers
- Career Development needs to be self-initiated
- Lack of advanced academic and training opportunities
- Mandatory courses repetitive & lack opportunity to acquire advanced knowledge and skills
- Austerity has limited opportunities for external courses and cross - fertilisation of ideas and shared good practice
- For CPD you can use a variety of sources, books, media, podcasts, YouTube, Journals, Social Work Publications
- Lack of "Brain Space" due to pressures is a barrier
- Control and Choice of CPD organisationally led
- No allocated study time and heavy caseloads adds pressure
- Engaging in CPD seen as way to avoid "victim blaming" by media

Methodology

- Review of published key policy documents, narrating the development and changes regarding initial social work education and continuing professional development
- Virtual Audio-visual semi-structured narrative interviews with twenty social work practitioners at various stages in their careers
- Interrogating the work of social science commentators Foucault, Freire, Fromm and Mills and their philosophical stances
- Thematic analysis of qualitative data, drawing out themes and linking to social science commentators' perspectives

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Appendix 16:

Table: 1 Organisation Types of Continuing Professional Development

Type of CPD Opportunity	
In-Service Training	
External Training	
Mandatory/Statutory Training	
Organisation Conference	
E-Learning	
Self-Directed Learning	
Virtual Learning	
Webinars	
University Programmes:	
Practice Teacher Programme 1 & 2	
Best Interests	
Mental Capacity Act	
Approved Mental Health Professional	
Systems & Family Therapy Programmes	
Models of Practice:	
Signs of Safety	
Strengths Based Approach	
Three Conversations	
Legal & Policy Update Seminars	
Access to Research in Practice	
Access to Community Care Inform – Adult and Children & Families	
Access to Child Care Consultancy	
Access to Principal Social Worker	
Supervision	
Group Supervision	
Peer Supervision	
Team Supervision	
Research Papers (DfE; DoH)	
Microsoft Teams Meetings (Covid)	
Zoom Team Meetings (Covid)	

Appendix 17: Table: 2

Participants' Choices of Continuing Professional Development

Type of Activity	Participant Engagement
In-service Training	
External Training	
Mandatory/Statutory Training	
University Programmes /Qualification	
Conferences, seminars	
Work-based Learning	
Self-directed learning	
Supervision	
Peer Supervision	
Group/Team Supervision	
Consultation Groups	
Critical Reflection on casework	
Mentoring	
Shadowing	
Secondment	
Webinars	
E-learning	
Audio Books	
Listening and participating in Social Work Podcasts	
Ted Talks	
Research in Practice	
NSPCC	
Coram	
Joseph Rowntree	
SCIE	
Mencap	
Mind	
Young Minds	
Age Concern	
Other	
Virtual Learning	
Reading Research by e.g., DfE, DH, SCIE, CC	
Reading research or contemporary articles	
Reading Social Work Theory Books	
Cardiff – What Works Unit ???	
Community Care Daily E-mail	
Community Care Inform – Adults or Children	
BASW	
Attending Lectures, Seminars or Conferences	
Presenting Seminars, lectures, or research	
Professional body membership	
Professional Networks	
Personal lived experience feedback	

Appraisals	
WhatsApp	
Face Book	
YouTube	
Blogs	
Zoom	
Microsoft Teams	
Documentaries	
Films	
FaceTime	
Eventbrite	

Appendix 18:

Example of Analysis of Participant's responses to Barriers to Continuing Professional Development - Elsie

This section will focus the theme of Barriers to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) drawn from data in Question 3 of the semi-structured interviews with participants who joined the research programme.

Elsie is a White English female in her early forties, with 9 years' experience. She is an assistant team manager with a large shire local authority in England, which spans both a mixture of small and large towns, as well as an extensive rural population. The population comprises of multi-cultural larger towns, as well as areas which have a predominantly white population. Her team works with Children & Families with a focus of under elevens and they are based in a small shire town. To preserve confidentiality, I have referred to the participant as Elsie.

When reflecting on the question concerning challenges and changes in practice, Elsie started to highlight various barriers relating to CPD she had encountered where challenges affected her being able to consistently focus and wholeheartedly engage when she was booked onto CPD training. Responding confidently without hesitation she said, "I mean, first and foremost 'brain space', following this by laughter. She went on to talk passionately about, not only her own experiences, but also from the perspective of a social work supervisor, about the work issues and pressures that posed a barrier to seamlessly being able to take up educational/learning opportunities. Her narrative emphasised the dilemma which Elsie, as a social work practitioner, as well as a supervisor with responsibility for staff faced when a work crisis occurred and they had to make choices. It was evident she faced a real dilemma about prioritising her own educational and developmental needs, and those of staff, and putting these over and above the real needs of service users as these were closely entwined.

Reflecting in our discussion Elsie commented:

> *"Like our brains are so full of so much stuff. Yeah, and its live stuff you know, its real stuff, it's families and what's happening for them. It's not theories based on a model that they've looked at on a chart in a spreadsheet in the training, it is real stuff. And I think it is very difficult you know for them (social workers) to then put down the "live stuff to prioritise the theory stuff." Yeah, they're like, well what am I going to do with this, like how is this going to change anything? On that day when they've got a million of other pressures to prioritise and that."*

Elsie went on to explain that whilst she knew engaging in training would be beneficial to her professionally, there were many occasions when she had had to cancel going on training to prioritise children and their families' needs. Her comments seem to reflect that her personal and professional commitment to the value base of social work (PCF2, SWE, 2019). Elsewhere in the interview she rationalised that she had made a choice to work in this area of practice and felt a commitment to the families

with whom she worked. Their lives had shifted from the realms of personal to that of the public issues arena (Mills, 1959), which is at the forefront of the social work role. Moving on in the interview Elsie came back again to what was, for her, the most principal factor and barrier that was not having the “Brain Space” to effectively engage and benefit from CPD, a recurring theme to which she returned several times in our discussion.

Elsie’s reflections raise a number of areas that can pose a barrier to prioritising CPD to achieve new knowledge, skills, and development, and put these over and above organisational needs. In the interview it was evident that Elsie felt a professional responsibility which is set out in the requirement of Social Work England (2019) to engage and evidence compliance with CPD in order to remain a registered social worker. Her comments evoked the idea of being a hostage to what Mills (1959) refers to as organisational bureaucracy that has, increasingly since the neo-liberal principles of the 1980s, led to social worker’s roles being de-professionalised by giving them less discretion and autonomy in decision-making. Foucault (1980) also highlights bureaucracy as an area where disciplinary power is often visible. In this context, there is the expectation that social workers must fulfil their obligation and comply with regulations imposed with regard to CPD in order to comply with registration requirements set down by their professional regulator. However, there is no obligation on employers to put in place safeguards to make this possible and protect and support social work practitioners by giving them manageable workloads to enable they can engage in meaningful CPD and have time to reflect on what they have learnt and integrate this into their practice. Elsie spoke about this aspect almost with resignation, which reminded me of Freire’s (1970) theme on fatalism, which sees these conditions as inevitable, and specifically applicable when reflecting on how many professionals have been de-professionalised by the state’s actions labelling this as “the bureaucratising of the mind” (Freire, 1970, p.102). This also is an example of social workers normalising their environments and what Manokha (2018, p.232) comments as “practising self-restraint and self-censorship” in acknowledging the tensions between CPD expectations and workloads but not feeling able to challenge them.

This led Elsie to move onto another barrier encountered by her and her colleagues, the issue of funding, which was partially connected by ongoing austerity, but also allocation of funding for CPD and impacted on professional development and staff competence. Elsie cited an example of Achieving Best Evidence Training (ACE) course that ran once a year. This was a collaborative course run primarily by the police but also included social work colleagues from within the police area. She stated that her authority would only fund one place per year for a social worker to attend, this being a three-day residential programme. Elsie went onto explain that the knowledge and skills taught on this course were central to work with children who had been subjected to abusive situations, physical or sexual, neglect or exploitation to ensure that they were interviewed appropriately and not tainting evidence by their inappropriate questioning. Interestingly, three other social workers from different authorities also raised this and saw it as an issue that was a serious deficit and limited their ability to acquire appropriate skills to effectively practise in this arena.

Moving on to discussing this theme further, Elsie spoke about the difficulties she encountered when attending in-house or day training courses and the barriers posed. She contrasted this with her experience of undertaking a three-day residential management course commissioned and paid for by the Department of Education, emphasising "she was lucky to be given a place." Commenting she said:

> *"Actually, being able to absorb is important you know, which is why the training that I did on the residential stay was so different as it forces you to stop working and it forces you to engage in what they're teaching you. Yeah, you know, not even what they're teaching you, it forces you to engage in the setting and what's being offered. Where you know I've been in training before and if I've got my phone with me and I'm responding to emails and I'm kind of under the table trying to do it you know it's sneakily."*

Elsie went onto explain that if you are on a residential course with no access to a laptop or mobile phone you had a clearer mind were able to engage. She spoke about the personal choice and discretion she experienced by going on this course and through this and another significant programme offered where she had been able to develop her knowledge and skills on a number of management issues and most importantly discover what type of manager she wanted to be, how she could achieve these attributes and what helped her to be successful and area Freire (1970) would describe as achieving emancipation and engaging with a 'being' mode of learning where the learner is fully present and can make deeper connection with the experience of being exposed to and assimilating new understandings.

Another link to the theme barrier raised by Elsie was the lack of study and protected time, as well as organisational support, to undertake CPD. Elsie told me that when she was a prequalifying student on a work-based social work course she was allocated one day a week for study leave to undertake her academic work which was the same as a full-time student each year on a conventional social work programme. She described having an excellent, supportive manager who encouraged and had insisted that she took the study leave which she usually did.

Elsie emphasised this saying:

> *"At that point I didn't have a caseload, I didn't have commitments in terms of work. I had a manageable sort of workload, and I always used to take my study day, it was always honoured, there was never any suggestion I couldn't take it. Um…and the organisation was supportive of me having that time."*

It was evident in her recall that she recognised that she needed this to apply herself to the academic side of her programme. However, post-qualifying her authority did not give study leave for CPD unless it was linked to an academic course at university, for instance Practice Teachers' Programme, when they had four days allocated. She went onto explain that with full workloads it was impossible to factor this in and assignments were normally undertaken outside core work time. Whilst mandatory training was usually undertaken during core working hours similarly there was no workload relief for this or any other training and this, inevitably, meant that work

connected with their workload overspilled into personal time affecting work/life balance. When reflecting on her role as supervisor to her team, Elsie commented that she recognised the importance of social work practitioners being given space and time to undertake CPD in order to increase their knowledge, skills, and research, but often there was a reluctance to prioritise this. Elsie commented that as a manager she was aware that if assigned time for training, or other work-related issues this "impacted on your teammates as everyone works really closely together." This proved a dilemma for practitioners who were familiar with the work pressures facing colleagues. Reflecting on their situation it connects with what Durkheim (1959) would describe as a form of secondary socialisation in an occupational setting, being socialised into the culture of the organisation and conforming to norms and values that were sometimes implied rather than explicit and, in some instances, contrasted with policies, and organisational statements about support for CPD.

Summary:

Reflecting on this section it is evident that barriers as a theme has many strands and for social work practitioners connects to, and effects, many areas of their practice. Elsie, in her reflections, has articulated many of these points, highlighting that to effectively undertake CPD and benefit from learning opportunities that social workers need to be in a climate where continuing professional development is valued, prioritised, with organisational commitment and support, as well as individual social workers having the personal space and time to focus on their development. It was clear that time, resources, and competing workload and priorities were significant barriers to engaging meaningfully in CPD. There is also an emotional context with clear signs of guilt (Elsie described "*sneakily" looking* at her phone during a training course) as well as being pulled in different directions by workplace demands. Only when these building blocks are in place can, social work practitioners effectively engage, build on their knowledge and skills that will be of benefit to service users, which is the long-term objective of social work intervention.

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