Resonance, Dissonance, Rejection: Experiences of Probationary Lecturers in UK Higher Education

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Declaration of authenticity

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Abstract

This thesis reports on an investigation into individuals' experiences of, and responses to, the academic probationary period in UK higher education. The theoretical lens of critical realism is applied to reports of probationary experiences in relation to perceptions of cultures and structures, and the potential for agency, articulated by probationary academics. These perceptions were gathered through a series of in-depth narrative interviews with 23 academics across a year of their probationary period, analysed thematically.

Central to this thesis is the presentation of a tripartite model of stances towards academic probation that emerged from the data. The distinguishing feature of this model, which structures the findings chapters, is participants' developing sense of agency within the UK higher education context. The three analytic categories derived from the data – resonance, dissonance and rejection – reflect this distinction. From secondary analysis of the narratives important sub-themes emerged regarding the influence of local and institutional cultures and the role of professionally-significant others.

The academic probationary period is rarely used as a frame of reference in higher education research. To address this issue, this study highlights the lived experiences of a small sample of new academics, and the evidence gathered can be used to inform institutional approaches to probation. From the findings presented, recommendations are developed that may usefully feed in to policies and practices for institutional policy-makers and educational developers. The conclusions argue for greater transparency as to the nature and purpose of probation, and a stronger role for educational development units in brokering probationary requirements.

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Chapter 1: Transitions to academic life

Prologue

At the moment I've got a relatively small teaching load, just 2 to 4 hours a week depending, so that's a real breeze but I think next semester it's more so they're trying to give me a nice time to adjust to things but at the moment there's no time for me to think about any publications or conference papers, nothing at all, I'm just coping at first and actually it is very scary… I don't like the probationary period, I think it's ridiculous. The rules are not clear and it may be in the gift of the Head of Department. It's not clear how many papers you need to pass. Do you need 1 paper or 1,000?... I thought the probationary period would be over let's say if I have the higher education certificate because that's what personnel told me. Now I wasn't aware that maybe a certain number of publications is attached to that [laughs] so I don't know and no-one knows... Oh, he's the head of section so I see him quite regularly but not about anything that's going on with me, it's normally for him to delegate something else to me because he doesn't want to do it normally, um, I have great respect for the man but he's just one of these people who's here to further himself... since I got the teaching evaluation questionnaires back with very nasty comments from students... I don't actually really know what my principles are to be honest, you know. I think it's unfair if someone's cheating you know then on the other hand I don't want to look like an uptight idiot about it either… but coming from that to nothing, being on my own, and trying and bounce ideas off people and then people nick your ideas and you just kind of go, hang on, and you become very kind of, so this is my stuff and it's awful, a really horrible way of being... whether they want to have great teachers or whether they only want great researchers or if they want both or I don't know, it immediately gives mixed

messages... I can do good research... but then the aim is money, right, give me the money, [banging fist on table] only the money... Someone says you won't pass [probation] if you don't have a PhD student, or x number of papers – but I don't know what x is. It is left to the interpretation of the HoD for probation... I think the worst thing is the complete and utter lack of any kind of team work, everybody's just in their own little hole... it is like I'm a blank piece of paper that I cannot be trusted and there's something about it [having an annual work schedule] stamped approved on every page that I find particularly outrageous…

Framing the problem: academic probation in the UK

Serving an academic probationary period (APP) is common practice for those appointed to their first academic post in the UK. It is not a concept, however, that currently features in higher education literature, so there is no foundational literature that problematises the APP, what it is for, and what is expected to be achieved as a result of undergoing such a process. Most often, the APP is seen as a temporal process commonly lasting between one and three years; what constitutes probationary success, why it is set at such widely-differing time periods, and what institutional requirements are to evidence successful completion, are frequently far more opaque.

The length of probation and the conditions attached to it can vary widely; periods ranging from six weeks to four years have been found. The most common models, however, tend to vary by institutional type. Older (pre-1992) universities tend to adopt a three-year probationary period, with the potential to extend this period to four years if there is cause for concern. In contrast, newer universities (post-1992s) tend to adopt a one-year term. Some institutions impose a probationary period each time an individual moves to a different role. Conversely, other institutions do not impose such conditions if an individual has served a probationary period elsewhere. In this context, probation is taken to mean the employment status ascribed to new academics from when they first take up an academic post until, some time later,

they are confirmed in that post. A new academic, for the purposes of this study, is someone on an academic contract and subject to probationary conditions.
Whilst the length of an APP in a given institution is reasonably easy to ascertain, the actual conditions attached to completing it successfully are far harder to discern. Some institutions provide helpful guidance to new academics, in the form of a table of activities and expected performance levels, which may be publicly available (for an example, see the University of Strathclyde, 2011). Others appear to make no such provision. For this reason, this study sought to address the nature of the academic probationary period, which can be likened to the notion of an '*underlying game'* (Perkins, 2006) which encompasses tacit requirements for successful completion.

Requirements, procedures and conditions attached to the APP rightly vary in line with different institutional missions and goals but, as can be seen in the prologue above, many of these processes remain opaque to new academics subject to institutions' probationary demands. Gaining a greater insight into how probation is experienced across a range of UK higher education institutions (HEIs) – and subsequently to consider the implications of such experiences – were the primary goals of this study.

Despite the increasing differentiation of university missions and practices (Barnett, 1994), probation is a condition almost universally applied to new academics in a wide range of settings. The lived reality of what is a significant transition remains underexplored in our understandings of new academics' roles and responsibilities. As probationary lecturers form a specific category of staff, and are subject to a range of demands to satisfy probationary conditions, it is timely to consider how these demands are experienced, especially in light of previous research into academic practices.

One criticism that can be made of existing literature that deals with the experiences of new academics is that much of it samples the target population in a 'snapshot' manner. By this, I mean that the views and/or experiences of new academics are explored just once in the course of any particular study. Only recently have examples of multiple sampling points started to appear (Sadler, 2008 and Archer,

2008a; 2008b in a UK context, Sutherland (2010) internationally). In line with these latter studies, a longitudinal approach has been taken in this work, to try and gain a sense of trajectory through the probationary period.

My aim, in exploring the key influences on new academics in their probationary periods, was not so much the 'disinterested pursuit of truth' but to gain '*practically adequate'* (Sayer, 1992) insights into the APP. The primary motivation behind the study was a strong professional interest, as one increasingly common condition attached to the APP concerns some level of achievement in an institutionally-provided teaching qualification. This is reflected in literature focusing on the APP that relates to formal initial professional development (IPD) with regards to teaching and learning (Warnes, 2008).

When I began this work, however, I was also a probationary academic myself, subject to my own institution's then rather nebulous demands. I arrived in my first academic post with a few years' experience of higher education, working on externally-funded projects, in two very different institutions. One was a large post-92 HEI with an open access mission, the other a Russell Group institution. The contrast between the ways these two universities operated could not have been greater and I assumed my prior experiences would be beneficial in decoding the practices of my new institution.

The shift, from academic-related, project-focused roles, to an academic one, shaped mostly by absence (of guidance, milestones or any other marker of successful progress) was enormous. Thus I developed a strong secondary motivation: exploring narratives of transition to academic life. In undertaking this work I could simultaneously be positioned as very much an '*insider'* and '*outsider'* (Robson, 2002) in this research, albeit wearing three hats: my educational developer persona hoping for professionally relevant, '*practically adequate'* knowledge (Sayer, 1992); my 'new academic' one seeking to understand Perkins' (2006) '*underlying game'*; and, of course, my concern as a PhD student to produce an acceptable thesis. I do not pretend, therefore, that I can disentangle any or all of these three rather different investments in this work, and I would argue this as beneficial; I truly entered the double hermeneutic of social science research:

> *a two-way movement, a 'fusing of the horizons' of listener and speaker, researcher and researched, in which the latter's actions and texts never speak simply for themselves, and yet are not reducible to the researcher's interpretation of them either.* (Sayer, 2000: 17)

This work was, therefore, undertaken from a particular position. I work as an educational developer in a Scottish university and come into contact with many newly appointed academics. My main teaching contributions are two-fold. First, I contribute to several modules on a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCert)[1]. Second, I coordinate a series of unaccredited workshops for doctoral students, some of whom aspire to an academic career (McAlpine and Akerlind, 2010). My interest is not only in how participants on both programmes experience this provision, but in whether and how such provision supports their career aspirations and transitional experiences.

The remainder of this short introductory chapter summarises some key literature that deals with issues of concern to probationary academics. As contemporary higher education literature tends not to use the APP as a frame of reference, works regarding the increasing requirement of teaching qualifications and works that deal with academic disciplines and identities are drawn on as complementary to this study. Following this summary, I outline the structure of the thesis, before listing the publications and presentations that have arisen from this work.

Teaching qualifications

An increasingly obvious probationary demand in the UK is participation in some form of institutional teaching qualification. This particular condition is often outlined in an appointment letter for new academics. The need to undertake some form of IPD is most closely associated with institutional responses to the Dearing Report

[1] The terminology 'PGCert' is used throughout the thesis to indicate the initial professional development provision that many universities make for new academics. Such provision may be externally accredited by, for instance, the Higher Education Academy, and/or internally validated at specific educational levels.

(1997). The report recommended the instigation of teaching qualifications to raise the status of teaching and enhance confidence in this aspect of quality assurance processes, although many post-1992 institutions already had such provision. Pre-1992 institutions have, for the most part, developed their teaching qualifications to comply with Dearing's recommendations. One consequence of this is a variable pattern of provision. Gosling (2010) provides a useful summary of requirements across the UK sector, which shows that successful completion of a PGCert is often, but not always, a feature of probationary academics' workload. As Gosling (2010) notes, there is variety in requirements, from demonstrating engagement in a programme of IPD, to successful completion of a teaching qualification during the APP.

As a result of changes in response to Dearing (1997), there is now a large body of work concerned with the evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of PGCerts (see Prosser *et al.*, 2006; Knight, Tait and Yorke, 2006; Warnes, 2008). Despite a Professional Standards Framework (PSF) (HEA, 2006, currently under revision), there remains a considerable degree of contestation about what form IPD provision should take. Even with the increasing prevalence of PGCerts, there remain two common views about the purpose of the qualification. One view focuses on preparation for, and professionalising, the teaching role (Gibbs and Coffey, 2004). The second view promotes a more diffuse brief, of holistic socialisation to academic practice (Brew and Boud, 1996). Less contestable is the uncertain terrain – both disciplinary and institutionally – that shapes the professional positioning of those responsible for conducting the IPD agenda (Gosling, 1996, 2001, 2009; Land, 2004, 2008) and a range of alternative models are in evidence (Gosling, 2010; Macfarlane and Hughes, 2009).

Educational developers frequently find themselves having to work at paradoxical interfaces (Land, 2008), often misunderstood or resented as having little to contribute. Often, an IPD requirement can be seen by new academics and their heads of department as 'stealing' time that could otherwise be spent productively on research. The role of the PGCert within both the APP, and in departments, can often be misunderstood (Comber and Walsh, 2008), and local practices (Trowler and Cooper, 2002) are therefore likely to play an important role for probationers.

It appears to be the case, however, that many such qualifications have their roots in a single educational research tradition, first formulated by Marton and Saljo (1976). This tradition, known as phenomenography, has focused exclusively on a limited number of conceptions of teaching and learning and does not challenge the role of biography in constituting these positions. The continuing primacy of a dominant generic and phenomenographic approach (Haggis, 2009), has long been questioned:

> *Just as we should encourage contest in our students, so too should the higher education discourse be the site of challenge and contestation. For this to take place requires openness to the views of Others. It also implies resistance within the discourse to those who would define it restrictively, and to reflect their own image. This is a topical issue as higher education researchers, developers and practitioners consider professional arrangements to represent their interests, including moves to credential and professionalise both higher education teachers and staff developers.* (Webb, 1997: 210)

Webb's view of more than a decade ago was a prescient one: much of the literature relating to the the APP focuses on the IPD agenda, and relies on this phenomenographic perspective. Indeed, the view underpins much of what has been achieved in the professionalisation and accreditation of university teaching (Prosser *et al*., 2006). As Haggis (2009) asserts, this narrow epistemological and methodological stance may be limiting, as experience of designing, developing and delivering courses of IPD has increased. Just as the student experience literature has moved on to consider issues of massification and diversity, bringing with it a plurality of theories and approaches (Haggis, 2009), formal requirements within the APP may need to pay attention to similar concerns as new colleagues join the academy with an increasing diversity of backgrounds and experiences.

It is possible that the requirements of the PSF constrain what might be possible in a PGCert and this militates against a recognition of the strength of local (and potentially less desirable (Trowler and Cooper, 2002)) practices that will form the

backdrop for the environment for new academics. As Trowler and Cooper argue, the '*teaching and learning regimes'* (2002) enacted within what is meant to be the supportive environment of the PGCert can be so divorced from actual practice as to render them unhelpful. If there is also limited access to a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), the transition to academic life can be troublesome, leading to disjuncture (Savin-Baden, 2000) which can provoke liminal spaces (Meyer and Land, 2003). There is a sense, in some literature (Ashworth *et al.*, 2004) that PGCerts can engender opposition.

The PGCert is often an explicit formal demand on new academics undertaking the APP, as noted above, but it is not the only demand. Commonly, evaluative work (Donnelly, 2006; Bamber, 2009) in this area focuses on the content and practices of a PGCert at the expense of paying attention to wider contextual issues. Ashworth *et al.* (2004), Cousin (2010) and Macfarlane and Gourlay (2009) take various approaches to explore the wider situating of participation in a PGCert that relate to biographies, positioning and understandings of context that are addressed in the following section.

Academic cultures and identities

As Trowler and Cooper (2002) show, there may be a substantial gap between what is espoused in a PGCert, and the daily practices novice academics encounter within their home departments. Probationary academics spend a far greater proportion of their time within their home departments, and thus gain far more exposure to local practices. Appreciating that the goal of new academics is to become a successful part of their local community of practice (Wenger, 1998) – for that is often where probation is considered – suggests that *'how things are actually done'* will remain a more powerful tool during probationary lecturers' APP than the goal of *'doing things well'* implicit in PGCerts. This idea raises the immediate tension of differing purposes between those who provide PGCerts, and those who participate in them, an example of working '*with/in contradiction'* (Peseta and Grant, 2011).

Previous studies have focused on the characteristics of various *'academic tribes and territories'* (Becher, 1989; Becher and Trowler, 2001), and responses to policy

changes (Henkel, 2000; Trowler, 1998). Despite current probationary procedures existing for 40 years or so (Gordon, personal communication) in the UK context, studies concerned with academic identities and cultures do not appear to have considered, as a priority, how the transition to academic life is experienced, focusing instead on more established staff. Whatever probationary requirements or expectations are set in the local institutional context, how new academics actually experience their APP is an issue that has been largely neglected in higher education research.

More recently, Archer (2008a and b[2]), from a feminist standpoint has begun to explore professional identity amongst new academics. She shares a concern for '*authenticity'* with Kreber (2010), supporting a view that the APP can be seen as a period of professional socialisation, rather than a credentialising process (Gibbs and Coffey, 2004). The notion of authenticity, however, like that of professional identity (Gordon and Whitchurch, 2010), is contestable, and not necessarily within the power of the individual to determine alone (Archer, 2000). The purpose of probation can thus be seen as similarly problematised, with no clear view of its purpose.

Conceptions of identity as elaborated by Lawler (2008) suggest fluctuating, individual *and* collective influences. A neoliberal discourse, imported from North American business schools (Head, 2011) can be seen to permeate the management structures of the academy as evinced by Davies and Petersen (2005). This suggests that successful negotiation of the APP may reward more individually-focused and competitive behaviours than previously, where a collegial ethos was more commonplace than the increasing corporatisation that Gordon and Whitchurch (2011) elaborate.

Agency and autonomy, as Davies and Petersen (2005) explain, need to be actively encouraged to serve a neoliberal agenda, whilst simultaneously rewarding only specific forms of behaviour. Thus, agency in academic work is to be applauded provided it is directed at furthering the '*new performativity'* (Davies and Petersen,

[2] Several different authors who share the same name are cited. Whilst it is usual to distinguish between them by using initials, this is cumbersome to the reader. As none of their publications referred to share a publication year, the usual convention has been dispensed with to aid readability.

2005: 95). Developing autonomous academic identities which, contradictorily, can be both fragile things, always in development as Taylor (2008) reminds us, and more fixed, where '*ways of thinking and practising'* (McCune and Hounsell, 2005), are conditioned by years of immersion in specific academic cultures (Becher and Trowler, 2001). The tension between long-standing academic practices (Becher and Trowler, 2001) and quality assurance regimes and concerns (Henkel, 2000) shape institutional and departmental practices that those undergoing an APP must learn to negotiate.

There appears, therefore, to be an inherent difficulty for probationary academics in understanding whether their APP is a period for establishing an authentic academic identity (Archer, 2008b; Kreber, 2010) or fulfilling a credentialising function (Gibbs and Coffey, 2004). This dichotomy is further complicated by a lack of transparency of what, institutionally, constitutes probation. This study can be positioned as an initial exploration into the influences at work during the APP, and how various demands are experienced by probationary academics.

Research questions

Literature concerning the value, effectiveness and impact of teaching qualifications for new academic staff has, understandably, commonly been undertaken by educational developers to the extent that Crawford (2010) suggests the '*voices from below'* are missing. The point in evaluative work on PGCerts is to synthesise findings over time (Bamber, 2009) to influence educational development practice. It is not necessarily to focus on specific experiences of the APP, meaning that individual voices can be lost. In contrast, work concerning academic cultures and identities is commonly the concern of sociologists of (higher) education. The two communities – educational developers and sociologists – tend not to share theoretical frameworks or perspectives, and these literatures therefore tend to proceed in parallel. I attempt in this work was to situate the practices of initial professional development into the wider social context of transition to academic life by applying the sociological lens of critical realism (Archer, 1996) to this study.

Three research questions guide this thesis:

1) What are the key influences on new academics in relation to probation;
2) How are these influences experienced; and
3) How is agency experienced in relation to these influences?

I would argue that the '*voices from below'* (Crawford, 2010) are represented in literature on IPD. However, they do tend to be limited to answering questions from an educational development perspective, specifically, in trying to evidence the impact of the IPD agenda (Kreber and Brook, 2001). In situating my research questions in the wider context of transition to academic life, I aimed to elicit some insight into the potentially liminal and transformational experiences (Meyer and Land, 2003) of new academics undergoing the APP.

Limitations to the study

Given the range of circumstances and practices alluded to above, it is only right to acknowledge what work of this nature can achieve. It was an exploration into the lived experiences of a small number of individuals currently subject to a range of probationary requirements, and how this situation feels. In this respect, I suggest this study is illuminative. To place this work in context, I appeal primarily to the notions of '*persuasiveness'* (Gomm, 2004; Riessman, 1993) and '*practical adequacy'* (Sayer, 1992). The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) regularly collects data on academic employees; it does not, however, separately categorise probationers. Without such information, it would be difficult to ascertain what a representative sample of the population under consideration might look like. An opportunistic sample, with all the limitations that entails, can therefore be seen as one useful strategy to begin to tackle the research questions.

Contestable conceptions, such as institutional notions of what probation is for, and ideas around academic socialisation, professional identity and individual authenticity in the APP, require careful treatment that, to date, do not appear to have been published in the higher education literature. For these reasons, this study was timely but limited; it relies on an opportunistic sample and there are few parameters available with which to compare findings and limitations. Stake (1995) argues for the

benefits of the single case in his approach to case study research. Whilst this study goes beyond the single case, it is exploratory and does not seek to establish a totalising discourse of academic probation as this must remain, as Archer (2003) suggests, a negotiation between an individual and their current circumstances.

Summary

To summarise, the academic probationary period in the UK is a variable beast. It may range from a matter of weeks to one or potentially four years; it may require, or offer, or pay no attention to, a teaching qualification (Gosling, 2010); and a possibly marginalised group of staff, commonly badged as academic or educational developers (Land, 2008), is charged with implementing a set of '*standards'* (HEA 2006) where a PGCert is required. With such a variety of procedures and requirements on offer, it is surprising that there is not a wider literature on which to draw that investigates and characterises the APP, and the probationary journeys of new academics.

The study reported on here sought to investigate contemporary practices and is one of few studies (see also Archer, 2008a and b; Sadler, 2008, Sutherland, 2010) to employ a longitudinal approach. The distinctive claim made for this work is that it seeks to position probation at the heart of the enquiry and thus have a fuller story to tell beyond either good practice evaluations of PGCerts or the views of more established staff. The aim, therefore, was a more roundly-developed picture of the variety of influences at work throughout the APP and how these are experienced by the probationary academics who volunteered to be part of this study.

Structure of the thesis

The broader framing and contextualisation of this enquiry has been explored in this introductory chapter, along with a personal reflection on why I was interested in undertaking this work. This section outlines the structure and content of the thesis to assist the reader in locating issues of interest and the direction of the argument.

In Chapter 2, literature is reviewed from the areas of critical realism (Archer, 1995, 2003; Sayer, 1992, 2000) and initial professional development. I attempt to inter-relate these strands of literature as a way of conceptualising how the academic probationary period might be investigated, and what issues may be of concern. Key constructs from critical realism, such as culture, structure and agency, are outlined as useful lenses to make sense of the data generated in this study.

Methodological issues are visited in Chapter 3, where I justify my approach and detail the particulars of method, sample and analysis. Here also, I frame how I will deal with the findings, where I thematically analyse (Polkinghorne, 1995) the experience-centred narratives (Squire, 2008) collected in this study. An evaluation of my approach is included, along with the limitations of this kind of study, and the ethical considerations for work of this nature, are dealt with here too.

The first of the findings are detailed and discussed in Chapter 4. After describing the proportion of the sample assigned to this category, I use the layers of culture, structure and agency (Archer, 1995; 1996; 2000) to structure the findings. This chapter discusses the ‘resonant’ trajectory. This is the term I use for those new colleagues whose probationary period appears to present no undue challenges. The transition to probationary lecturer status is mostly smooth, though not without some uncertainty. The focus is on the articulation of personal effectiveness that distinguishes probationers in this category. This chapter also sets the structure followed for reporting the remaining findings.

The ‘dissonant’ trajectory emerges from the data presented in Chapter 5. It is in this area that the departmental locus of learning and development advocated by Trowler and Knight (2000) appears to break down, and where there appears to be no localised community of practice enabling sensitisation to the role. Several sources of such dissonance are posited: inequitable probationary requirements, increasing bureaucratisation and the culture of the department.

Rejection is the theme for Chapter 6. In this small section of the sample, the rejection of an academic identity appeared to stem from a personal acceptance of the neoliberal agenda, and the perception that HE in the UK currently falls so far

from attaining the requisite performativity. The totalising discourse that Davies and Petersen (2005) suggest has permeated all aspects of HE is, in effect, being dismissed as little more than amateurish attempts to impose a neoliberal agenda by UK HEIs.

Chapter 7 is a comparative discussion of the preceding findings chapters, relating these to the theoretical positioning established in Chapter 2, and presents a conceptual framework of the academic probationary period. The sense of agency (Archer, 2000) was the primary distinguishing feature that facilitated categorisation of the respondents in this study. This chapter therefore looks across, rather than within the categories, to address the research questions.

The final chapter, 8, extends the discussion from the previous chapter by drawing practical, policy and theoretical conclusions. These include an argument for greater transparency in the APP, and institutional and departmental efforts towards better communication of the tacit, as well as explicit, demands that characterise probation. Greater clarity over the purpose(s) of the APP, that sits comfortably with the range of duties expected, is suggested. Recommendations for further work are also included.

Publications/presentations arising from this work

*Smith, J. (2011), Beyond evaluative studies: perceptions of teaching qualifications from probationary lecturers in the UK, *International Journal for Academic Development*, 16, (1), 71-81.

*Smith, J. (2010), Essay: Academic identities for the 21st century, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 15, (6), 721-727.

Smith, J. (2010), Decent data in need of good theory: the multifaceted nature of probationary lecturers' experiences, Higher Education Close-Up 5 Conference, Lancaster, July.

Smith, J. (2010), Investigating the role of teaching qualifications for probationary academics in the UK, International Consortium for Educational Development Conference, Barcelona, June.

Smith, J. (2010), Anger, uncertainty and disillusion: moving the goalposts for probationary academics, Academic Identities for the 21st Century Conference, Glasgow, June.

*Smith, J. (2010), Forging identities: the experiences of probationary academics in the UK, *Studies in Higher Education*, 35, (5), 577-591.

Smith, J. & Sinclair, C. (2008), Evaluating impact: troubling orthodox methods. SEDA Annual Conference, Birmingham, November.

Smith, J. (2008), Forging identities: the liminal space of new academics. Academic Identities in Crisis Conference, UCLan, Preston, September.

Smith, J. (2008), “I don’t know yet...” Exploring the liminal spaces of new academics. 2nd Threshold Concepts Symposium, Kingston, Ontario, June.

*Elements of this thesis have previously been published in the articles marked with an asterisk above.

Chapter 2: Constructing the study's conceptual space

Individuals undergoing the academic probationary period (APP) may be subject to a wide range of different influences. This study sought to explore the APP for new lecturers as they make the transition to academic life, as noted in Chapter 1, rather than more established academics who may encounter further periods of probation as they take up new roles. As it has not proved possible to source any prior work from the UK higher education literature[3] that uses the APP as a frame of reference, it is the work of this chapter to review complementary literature and to draw on useful conceptual constructs that can be used to shape this study.

From my own experience of working in educational development, and as Gosling (2010) observes, some form of initial professional development (IPD) is increasingly required of probationary academics. This commonly takes the form of participation in at least some aspects of a PGCert, so it is to the literature that focuses on formal teaching qualifications that I turn first in this chapter. This is explored in relation to: the circumstances surrounding the brief history of professional development provision; the nature and purpose of IPD; and what evaluative studies have to say about participants' experiences of PGCerts.

Following a consideration of IPD, the wider context of *'academic tribes and territories'* (as elaborated by Becher and Trowler, 2001) is explored. The literature regarding IPD and '*academic tribes'* (Becher and Trowler, 2001) were reviewed to ensure that the relevant context for the APP was taken into account in this study. These well-established literatures have been related to the critical realist framework (Archer, 1995, 2003; Sayer, 2000). A final substantive section of this chapter looks beyond the structural requirements of IPD and the cultures of academic disciplines towards an elaboration of the theoretical lens of critical realism with its concern for agency as a framework that can provide a usable tool to interrogate the APP.

[3] It is acknowledged that a substantial body of work exists in the North American context dealing with the process of tenure. This body of work is cited only rarely in this thesis, as the two systems differ profoundly. In the UK context, probation is always time-limited, and a presumption of confirmation has historically existed (Smith, 2011).

Initial professional development

One common and explicit requirement of the contemporary APP process is the need to engage with an institutionally-provided IPD agenda. This is a relatively recent requirement, as outlined in the section below. Following on from this summary of the roots of IPD, the nature and purpose of provision is described, before turning to an analysis of what recent evaluative studies can bring to a study of the APP. It is suggested that the requirement to participate in IPD as part of the APP is a structural demand (i.e. not one that is determined at individual or departmental level).

In terms of structure, the existence of a probationary process denotes that there are rules and procedures that govern the early years of an academic career. Sayer (2000: 18) points out that *'reasons can be causes'* and that, while choices are in the power of individuals, they tend to be exercised in relation to other factors:

> *In the social world, people's roles and identities are often internally related, so that what one person or institution is or can do, depends on their relation to others... The powers which they can draw upon depend partly on their relations to one another, and to relevant parts of the context...* (Sayer, 2000: 13)

For those subject to the APP, some explicit demands are made, most often related to IPD, whilst at the same time, these individuals are seeking to establish their academic identities. Powers and relations are not necessarily well understood at this early point in an academic career, and the immediate context may play a role in the choices (Dowd and Kaplan, 2005) that new academics make. The experience of such structures is in part the focus of this thesis, although these rules and procedures cannot be interpreted without a consideration of the wider social context in which they exist.

Some structures are easily discernible; others less so. Similarly, structures may be justifiable, or perceived to be inequitable. Some are amenable to change; others may be so deeply embedded in the practices of institutions that they seem

impervious to modification. Archer (1995) elaborates this issue in terms of morphogenesis/morphostasis, where cultures change or reproduce (this is explored further below). Responses to institutional structures – in the forms of compliance or contestation – can shape an individual's career, and/or their perceptions of what is important in defining a career trajectory.

A brief history

Since the Dearing report (NCIHE, 1997) recommended 'dual professional' status for those lecturing in higher education, teaching qualifications have become a primary form of initial professional development (IPD) for new academics. By the use of the term 'dual professional' Dearing (1997) recognised that disciplinary knowledge was not necessarily a sufficient base for academic practice. The Dearing Report (1997) was the culmination of a longer-standing agenda that had sought to gain a degree of recognition that teaching in higher education carried with it a responsibility to pay attention to learners' needs. The Dearing recommendation (1997) reflected efforts begun much earlier, to professionalise the teaching aspect of the academic role, as McAleese (1979) explained.

The professionalisation of teaching had a long history in its efforts to become recognised in academic practice (McAleese, 1979). It appears that such efforts were actually the catalyst for current probationary arrangements in UK higher education through the Association of University Teachers/Universities Authorities Panel (AUT/UAP) Agreement (McAleese, 1979). He reported on a university-trade union agreement in 1971 that constitutes current probationary practice. He also highlighted the difficulties of achieving consensus on IPD. Gordon (personal communication) suggests that the current three-year probationary period in pre-1992 institutions is likely to have come about through the abolition of the junior lecturer grade in the 1971 agreement, substituted instead by an extended APP that included attention to teaching development needs.

The polytechnics and colleges of higher education, excluded from the union negotiations, were freed from local authority control in 1992 and many were

conferred a university title following the government's removal of the sector's binary divide. They retained, however, many of the terms and conditions of employment for their staff. One response to 'new university' status of relevance to this study was a demand for recognition of the teaching commitment of staff, and the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) initiated a teacher accreditation programme. This has since been supplanted by national accreditation via the Higher Education Academy (HEA) (see, for instance, the HEA's Professional Standards Framework (PSF, 2006), currently under review), building on work initially undertaken by the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILT).

One part of the terms and conditions the post-1992 universities retained, beyond a concern for valuing teaching distinctiveness, was an academic probationary period of one, and in very occasional instances, two, years, reflecting local authority employment practices. Whilst the SEDA tertiary teacher accreditation scheme was available, and taken up most often by post-1992 institutions, from 1992 onwards, it took until 2000 for the ILT to be established in the wake of the Dearing recommendations (1997). By 2003, the HEA had been set up to be responsible for accreditation with respect to all learning and teaching for staff working in higher education. The different needs and requirements of UK higher education institutions (HEIs), given the variation in the APP noted above, have, to some extent, been harmonised within the HEA accreditation scheme.

It remains the case, however, that the differential practices of pre- and post-1992 institutions are still in place in terms of the APP. There is a greater (although not universal) convergence on the need for IPD for new academic staff than can be seen in the past. The variable timescales involved can often shape the nature and purpose of the IPD agenda (Gosling, 2010), which is explored further in the following section of this chapter.

The nature and purpose of IPD

For the reasons noted above, IPD differs substantially from institution to institution in the UK. The most up-to-date picture comes from a recent survey by Gosling (2010),

reported to the SEDA community. Whilst this is by no means comprehensive, it does give an indication of differing requirements by type of institution. Some PGCerts focus on a learning and teaching agenda, whilst others take an academic practice approach (Brew and Boud, 1996) considering wider issues (leadership, management and governance, or writing for publication, for instance). Some universities make no such requirements at all, and few, despite having mentoring procedures, adopt a team or departmental locus of control for IPD identified as desirable by Trowler and Knight, (2000).

The differing nature of provision – whether a teaching/learning focus or an academic practice one – suggests that the purpose served by a PGCert varies. The idea of purpose, however, is not an issue commonly discussed in the literature. Kandlbinder and Peseta focus on curriculum, but by exploring the key concepts in PGCerts, suggest this can '*often provide insights into the ideas that are valued'* (2009: 20). The five most commonly mentioned key concepts (reflective practice, constructive alignment, approaches to learning, scholarship of teaching and assessment-driven learning, Kandlbinder and Peseta, 2009: 22-25) appear to reflect a concern for participant engagement with managing learning experiences and encouraging personal reflection. These findings also suggest that a PGCert focused on teaching and learning is more prevalent. Whichever approach is adopted, however, a substantive concern for those who run PGCerts is evaluation, explored further in the following section.

Evaluative findings

Evaluative studies also take a range of approaches, from single cases (Donnelly, 2006), cumulative studies (Bamber, 2009), those expressly concerned with evidencing impact (Gibbs and Coffey, 2004) to large-scale surveys seeking confirmation of the effectiveness of a specific approach (Warnes, 2008; Prosser *et al.,* 2006). The smaller-scale studies tend to rely on several sources of data, but almost always include a participant perspective, often through interviews or focus groups. Their findings indicate aspects of PGCerts that work well and, sometimes, areas for improvement that can usefully inform other programmes. These studies

are often focused on a single institution (Donnelly, 2006; Bamber, 2009) and therefore very nuanced with regard to local contexts and cultures, meaning recommendations may not always be easily generalisable to other environments.

The study by Prosser *et al.,* (2006) was the first undertaken UK-wide on behalf of the HEA to evaluate accredited programmes. It was a large-scale questionnaire study that could not, therefore, take the nuance of local context into account. Instead, a standard tool, the Approaches to Teaching Inventory (ATI) (Trigwell *et al.,* 1999) was administered online to successful participants from HEA-accredited provision. Whilst this study had a very wide pool of potential respondents, three difficulties may have affected the findings. First, there is an assumption in the ATI that it measures change over time. The questionnaire, however, was administered only once, up to five years beyond participation in a PGCert, and asked participants to self-rate their current and previous conceptions of teaching. Second, by using the ATI, there is also an assumption that any HEA-accredited provision focuses on a conceptual change model of IPD. The final difficulty is the concentration only on successful completers, meaning the views of those still engaged in PGCerts were excluded.

Both the large and small-scale studies referred to above focus, quite rightly, on evaluating the teaching qualification, usually with an audience who have completed the programme. Knight, Tait and Yorke (2006) construed IPD more broadly, and as something that might still be ongoing. They found that '*learning on the job',* rather than formal provision, was a preferred mode of professional development for academics. This suggests that personal interest and motivation guide developmental activities (Crawford, 2010) in ways that are responsive to academics' needs. Institutions, however, may see IPD provision as a formal 'check and balance' that ensures quality assurance duties (Henkel, 2000) are discharged effectively.

The notion of IPD as structural mechanism

Structures, in their most obvious form, are the rules and resources (Giddens, 1984) available to govern performance in a particular role. In the case of academic

probation, these structures are not always expressly codified although, as Archer (1995) suggests, they are temporally sequenced. Structural rules govern probation and, even though variable, take a specific form at the time an individual encounters them. Archer (1995: 76) calls this a morphogenetic sequence:

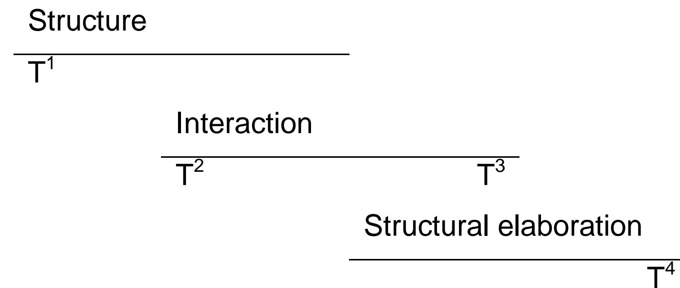

Figure 2.1 A morphogenetic sequence (from Archer, 1995: 76) T=time

From this model we can see that, rather than mutual constitution of structure and agency, argued for by Giddens (1984), interaction occurs within a pre-existing structure. Structural elaboration *'necessarily post-dates those actions'* (Archer, 1995: 76). The understanding that comes from the interaction may (or may not) feed in to actions to influence structures. Point T^4 in the diagram above returns to point T^1, where structures can be seen to evolve over time (morphogenesis) or reproduce themselves (morphostatis) (Archer, 1995).

Rather than the interdependence of agency and structure of which Giddens (1984) writes, Archer (2000) prefers the term interaction; she stresses the analytic possibilities of critical realism of separating culture, structure and agency to explore productively this interplay. This removes the necessity for the concepts to always be in tension, which gives rise to difficulties, such as:

> *... the question 'when does structure exert more influence over culture and vice versa?'* (Archer, 2000: xxviii)

It is a fundamental premise of critical realism to avoid conflating culture, structure and agency (Archer, 2000). It is argued here that academic and institutional cultures play a substantial role in the thinking of probationary lecturers and whilst this thesis

is overtly concerned with probationary practices, other structures, reflective of the properties of the wider social system, are also at play.

These structures would include the gendered nature, either of society or of academic disciplines (Clegg, 2001), and issues to do with ethnicity or disability. HESA statistics (2011) show a continuing small proportion of academic staff declaring a disability, and a continuing gender pay gap. Archer (2008a and b) shows how attributes such as age, gender and ethnicity can feed negatively into early career academics' perceptions of their roles. It has proved impossible to ascertain whether such features have a differentiating effect on research performance (RAE, 2008) between men, women and/or ethnic minorities, given that research productivity is a key criterion for successfully passing probation.

Programmes of professional development can potentially surface tacit knowledge and practices, and help new academics on the way to '*routinizing'* (Giddens, 1984) new practices. However, PGCerts also facilitate what I term a 'cohort effect'. The 'cohort effect' signifies the exchange of circumstances that has been enabled by the multi-disciplinary and cross-institutional intakes to PGCerts. Where once the APP may have proceeded in isolation, there are now institutional structures that – perhaps inadvertently – provide a forum for comparing local practices. These features may help to reveal inconsistencies in academic and institutional cultures and differential application of an assumed universal structure. The interplay of these factors can be productively analysed (Archer, 1996), and this view allows for an appreciation of local cultures and the potential for agency, and individuated responses to dominant conditionings inherent in complex social systems.

The tension between institutional demands and local cultural practices can manifest itself in differences that, as Comber and Walsh (2008) point out, may well be perception rather than reality. Using anonymised material from the UK's network of subject centres with new colleagues, little, it seems, may necessarily be seen to be unique to the teaching of a single discipline. Despite the difficulties of isolating disciplinary-specific perspectives and practices, there remains – perhaps as a consequence of the early intellectual commitment demanded by the British educational system – a very real perception that the most useful resources for new

colleagues to learn about their teaching role and responsibilities are those that speak from a disciplinary base. Whilst this resonates with Becher and Trowler's notion of academic tribes (2001), it undermines the multidisciplinary cohorts that usually constitute a PGCert where sharing practice is often privileged. Moving from generic frameworks to disciplinary aware ones such as Becher and Trowler's (2001) culture of disciplines or threshold concepts at least allows participants in PGCerts to engage from the beginning without the specialist jargon surrounding theories of learning. These frameworks, in contrast with more established phenomenographic approaches to understanding learning and teaching in higher education, pay due regard to the tacit and the personal, the latter a quality often overlooked in investigations into new lecturers' socialisation to their roles (Jones, 2011).

These issues perhaps highlight that true transformation – in our understanding and subjectivity – does not lurk around every corner. A single instance in the formal curriculum is as likely, potentially, to induce the desired shift in worldview, whereupon much else may be integrated in a new subjectivity. This may suggest that Threshold Concepts are not common in the formal curriculum, and that they are only of primary importance for those wishing to join a particular academic tribe. The significance of epistemological and ontological concerns are visited in the next section, where we consider issues of disciplinary culture and how they might speak to a concern for the teaching and learning agenda.

As noted above, a further difficulty is the positioning of PGCert evaluation work, with its focus on the course. This can divorce the qualification from its wider social context. In terms of Archer's (1995) '*morphogenetic approach'*, PGCert evaluation deals with the '*interaction'* phase, and thus can be critiqued for not focusing more extensively on the '*structural elaboration'* that would redefine its role for probationary academics. The increasing provision of IPD activities suggests that continued evaluative work will be beneficial, particularly where attention is paid to the context in which it occurs. It is to the variety of cultures and contexts that exist in UK HEIs to which I now turn.

Academic cultures and contexts

As Archer (1996) asserts, culture is a concept that has suffered from under-definition in sociological thinking:

> *At the* descriptive *level, the notion of 'culture' remains inordinately vague despite little dispute that it is indeed a core concept. In every way 'culture' is the poor relation of 'structure'... At the* explanatory *level the status of culture oscillates between that of a supremely independent variable, the superordinate power in society and, with a large sweep of the pendulum, a position of supine dependence on other social institutions.* (Archer, 1996: 1, emphasis in original)

Lacking definition, there is the danger that Archer (1996) highlights, that culture as a useful analytical tool, distinctive from structure and agency, is collapsed into them. This, she suggests, can lead to analytic confusion:

> *... when discussing 'structure' or 'culture' in relation to 'agency' I am talking about a relationship between two aspects of social life... The basic reason for avoiding this [the conflation of culture, structure and agency] is that the 'parts' and the 'people' are* not *co-existent through time and therefore any approach which amalgamates them wrongly foregoes the possibility of examining the interplay between them over time.* (Archer, 1996: xiv, emphasis in original)

What Archer is advocating here is the logical separation of these layers of analysis to understand their interaction in complex social systems. This separation is of particular interest in this thesis. For newcomers to the complex social system that is the contemporary university, it can be speculated that accessing and grasping both culture and structure will have an influence on their agentic behaviour.

The continuing influence of Becher and Trowler's (2001) seminal work on *'academic tribes and territories'* demonstrates how many academics experience their work within a *'culture of disciplines'.* Culture is a broad term, one commonly perceived as *'ways of thinking and practising'* (McCune and Hounsell, 2005) in the teaching and

research of particular academic disciplines that can be recognised globally (Becher and Trowler, 2001). Although culture in this interpretation might equate to an academic department, it does not necessarily do so. The tribal analogy may not always hold true either, so a unified culture of a discipline is, of course, too general a position. As Cousin (2008) notes, academics teach not only a discipline, but an approach to that discipline also, and many disciplines have evolved and fractured. It can often be the case that new lecturers are recruited specifically to address a perceived weakness in disciplinary teaching or research; in these circumstances the extant tribe may appear strange or hostile, and not necessarily a familiar cultural 'home'.

Whilst a university can be seen on one level as a single cultural system (Archer, 1996), this view would disguise the variability of practices within an institution where there are distinctive:

> *ways in which academics engage with their subject matter, and the narratives they develop about this, are important structural factors in the formulation of disciplinary cultures* (Becher and Trowler, 2001: 23).

It is at the intersection of the cultural system (Archer, 1996) and the disciplinary culture (Becher and Trowler, 2001) that the academic probationary period is conducted. In this section of the chapter I look first at the local culture, of the *'academic tribe'* (Becher and Trowler, 2001) as this is the activity system into which new lecturers are inducted (Trowler and Knight, 2000). This is followed by a brief exploration of the nature of institutional cultures influenced, as they are, by policy changes (Henkel, 2000).

Departmental contexts

Becher and Trowler (2001) explored the experiences of academic staff from a variety of institutions and disciplines to characterise their notion of 'academic tribes'. This built on earlier work (Becher, 1989) conducted only in elite institutions. Drawing

on Biglan's (1973) typology of hard-soft, pure-applied, disciplines, they investigated the nature of knowledge, communicative practices and career trajectories, among other things. Neumann *et al.* (2002) extended the use of the original typology (Biglan, 1973) by applying it to the teaching of academic disciplines. Underlying the highly variable disciplinary practices that Becher and Trowler (2001) explore was felt to be what Perkins (2006) calls '*epistemes'*:

> *'Ways of knowing' is another phrase in the same spirit. As used here, epistemes are manners of justifying, explaining, solving problems, conducting enquiries, and designing and validating various kinds of products or outcomes.* (Perkins, 2006: 42)

From Perkins' work (2006), it can be inferred that there is a strong tacit dimension – an uncodified ethos – in understanding how universities, departments and '*academic tribes'* (Becher and Trowler, 2001) function and vary. The difficulty with this position, of course, is that which is most valuable in understanding the culture of any specific academic department or institution remains unwritten. Accessing norms and values can then become a significant difficulty for new academics. Acker and Haque (2010) suggest that doctoral students be exposed to a wider variety of academic practices to overcome this issue. There is evidence, however, of a diversifying workforce (Gordon and Whitchurch, 2010; Butcher and Stoncel (forthcoming)) recruited from a range of professional backgrounds, for whom an expanded doctoral education would not be a solution to the tacit dimension of departmental cultures and practices.

Another view recognises the difficulties associated with tacit knowledge, and places it at the heart of a model of situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991), reporting on case studies of workplace based learning, where much is assimilated informally as part of the experience of being in a certain milieu. Expert practice, in Lave and Wenger's (1991) theoretical framework, is achieved over a long apprenticeship where much is imitated, rather than codified, and there is an assumption of the obligation of the community to foster learning and development. Building on this framework, Wenger (1998) developed a notion of '*communities of practice'* to encourage socially situated learning.

Active participation is a key criterion for membership of a '*community of practice'* (Wenger, 1998) but this perhaps does not acknowledge the more private, individual and increasingly competitive ethos (Watson, 2009) of higher education. As Wenger (1998) suggests, a community presupposes a '*joint enterprise'* that is:

> *the result of a collective process of negotiation that reflects the full complexity of mutual engagement (*Wenger, 1998:77)

As Davies and Petersen point out (2005), collegiality can be seen to be sacrificed in the face of new managerialism; if it were once common for senior academics to mentor their junior colleagues, this responsibility may decline as competition for scarce resources increases. Gouldner (1957) distinguished between '*locals'* and '*cosmopolitans'* where the former category focus on, and develop their academic identities in relation to, their home departments and institutions. Individuals with this perception of an academic role may identify more easily with Wenger's (1998) notions of '*joint enterprise'* and '*mutual engagement'*. Conversely, '*cosmopolitans'* look outwardly to the global community of their disciplines (Becher and Trowler, 2001). Dowd and Kaplan (2005) found a similar distinction more recently among American pre-tenure academics where some look to the local community and others to a wider stage.

Even where attempts are made at codification – and an increasing number of institutions have begun to develop criteria for probation and promotion (see for example, the University of Strathclyde, 2011) – this does not necessarily mean that such attempts will be successful. As Goffman (1959) asserts, '*front stage'* activities are public spaces. This is where the official communication of what is required for successful academic probation is presented, and it may not represent the *'collective process of negotiation'* that Wenger (1998) refers to. As an institutional process (see next section), the APP may also not reflect the diversity of practices embedded in *'the culture of disciplines'* (Becher and Trowler, 2001). Goffman extends his theatrical analogy to '*backstage'*:

> *It is here that the capacity of a performance to express something beyond itself may be painstakingly fabricated; it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed.* (Goffman, 1959: 114)

It is this more private space that may be used to determine performance:

> *HE is suffused with considerations of value and almost obsessively taken up with the identification of excellence... [This needs] to be recognized as contributing to a much wider process of appraisal...* (Becher and Trowler, 2001: 191).

Such considerations may remain firmly within the domain of '*tacit presumptions'* (Perkins, 2006) where various facets of the APP perceived to be in the control of the individual is, in fact but one element of an increasing '*audit regime'* (Strathern, 2000) and ranking process (Becher and Trowler, 2001). Disciplines and communities have been the focus of important work in understanding academic life (Becher and Trowler, 2001). Although Wenger (1998) does direct his notion of '*communities of practice'* to the organisational learning sphere, it is commonly used within the higher education context at the level of departments (Jawitz, 2009b) or cohorts (Gourlay, 2010). Work of this nature, however, is perhaps less focused on institutional cultures which may be perceived to change more substantively and more rapidly in relation to the policy context in which they operate (Henkel, 2000; Trowler, 1998).

The idea of a liminal space, and the related phenomenon of the *'underlying game'* (Perkins, 2006) play an invaluable role in drawing together both formal and informal learning and its role in identity formation for new academics. Perkins (2006) and Meyer and Land (2003; 2005) point us in the direction of contemplating the *being* aspects of an academic identity together with the *knowing* aspects. Against the backdrop of increasing fluidity (Clegg, 2008) versus increasingly managerialist demands (Davies and Petersen, 2005) (see below), Giddens' (1984) notion of *'ontological security'* may be challenged by discontinuities in norms and practice. Where a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) is unconducive, the liminal space becomes a useful lens through which to understand how academic identities are

constructed. The institutional level is, therefore, the focus of the next section of this chapter.

Institutional culture(s)

The culture(s) of institutions have also come under increasing scrutiny amid expansion and diversification of HE systems globally. Davies and Petersen (2005) write from an Australian perspective about increasing surveillance, and Tuchman (2009) from a North American one, where 'positional' good (Brown, 2011) is an imperative in an already fully marketised system now forecast for the UK (Browne, 2010). Writing of a period of earlier significant policy change, Henkel points out that:

> *Institutions had to find new markets in a context where ideas about the forms of knowledge and the quality of education and research became more contested. Institutions had to transform themselves rapidly into organisations that could manage complexity and change* (Henkel, 2000: 252).

As Head (2011) suggests, this process is ongoing. There appears to be less potential for the '*collegial'* institution and more scope for the '*bureaucratic'* one (McNay, 1995) where power is exerted in relation to a new quality regime (Morley, 2003). In response to more control by centralised functions of the university (Gordon and Whitchurch, 2011) it would seem that the APP is now more likely to be set and scrutinised centrally, with less reference to the differing patterns of disciplinary practices (Becher and Trowler, 2001) and:

> *Decisions about employment conditions are likely to reside with the governing body in bicameral governance arrangements. However, in devolved structures, local managers may have delegated authority for their academic and functional areas, subject to adherence to agreed institutional policies and procedures* (Gordon and Whitchurch, 2011: 71).

This can be seen as an example of Lipsky's (1980) '*street-level bureaucracy'* where delegation takes place, as central control is probably unmanageable in such large organisations. However, the interpretation of institutional demands are locally enacted, and the process of delegation can lead to an '*opaqueness'* of activities (Henkel, 2000: 87) that may differ between types of institution (Watson, 2009). The *'new managerialism'* (Deem *et al.,* 2007; Davies and Petersen, 2005) afflicts all kinds of institutions. How this is realised will vary and for new academics, it is possible that the immediate demands of institutional culture(s) will exercise as much influence as those of the disciplines. It is reasonable to speculate that probationers will wish to pay attention to institutional cues in ways reminiscent of Gouldner's (1957) '*locals'*. As Henkel suggested, in the last period of intense policy change, academics experienced:

> *Increased interactions with the institution... limiting their control of the working environment, reducing their status and shifting their own use of time from the academic to the administrative* (Henkel, 2000: 253)

with the implications of this stance regarding de-professionalisation and re-professionalisation in terms of '*third space'* activity (Whitchurch, 2008). Institutional concerns and changes have received more attention in recent times, as Watson suggests:

> *systematic scholarly work on leadership in HE was largely absent from the literature until relatively late in the twentieth century... In the last two decades this has all changed. HEIs are seen as serious (social) businesses to be managed; the expectations of performance (and of accountability) are high; and – oddly, given the objectively strong record of universities and colleges in meeting new challenges and avoiding disaster – there is a public and political perception of leadership deficit* (Watson, 2009: 130).

The '*more pressing priorities'* (Trowler: 2008: 132) for institutional cultures and change appear mostly to be in response to changes in policy drivers (Henkel, 2000). Apart from the impact of the quality assurance agenda reported by Henkel (2000),

there is far less evidence that academic practice at the '*street'* level (Lipsky, 1980) is strongly shaped by policy changes. This may be an explanation of why the academic probationary period has remained uncodified, unexamined and unproblematised. The demands of successful completion of the APP have, of course, changed in recent years to incorporate an IPD requirement. Beyond that, however, as Dowd and Kaplan (2005) suggest, a perception of institutional demands can be accommodated or ignored. Institutional energies are taken up in finding creative responses to a rapidly-changing policy context (Henkel, 2000; Brown, 2011), delegating the management of staff to the realm of 'street-*level bureaucracy'* (Lipsky, 1980) and largely leaving the *'culture of disciplines'* as one of the most recognisable features of university life.

In order to explore in depth the key influences on probationary academics, the literature reviewed in the previous sections is useful in understanding the structural and cultural demands of institutions. Whilst Wenger (1998) and Becher and Trowler (2001) do make reference to the role of those in the communities that constitute HEIs, there is perhaps less of a focus on the agency of the individuals involved in understanding and shaping their probationary circumstances. Drawing from Dowd and Kaplan (2005), it seems appropriate to explore further a theoretical lens that acknowledges individual agency and institutional interaction. Trowler (1998, 2008) and Henkel (2000) also recognise the potential for policy mediation through institutional structures.

For these reasons, I have chosen to 'borrow' the sociological theory of critical realism that is not well used in higher education research, although there are a few exceptions (Kahn, 2009; Crawford, 2010). Critical realism maintains a focus on the two levels explored in the earlier part of this chapter, of structural demands and of institutional cultural but it also pays due regard to the notion of agency. As I am not a sociologist, I am aware that this 'borrowing' can be seen as an instrumental move. The framework of critical realism does, however, provide a useful tool to shape and interpret data gathered in response to experiences of the academic probationary period.

The critical realist concern for agency

New academics arrive in universities with complex biographies, hopes and aspirations for, and expectations of, their new roles. Added to these personal circumstances are structural demands and requirements laid down by the institutions that new academics join. Such demands are likely to include certain levels of performance in areas such as research productivity, knowledge exchange, and teaching competence. As Becher and Trowler (2001) have elaborated, there is also likely to be cultural adjustment, as new academics take on new responsibilities in the service of their disciplines and departments. Archer (1996) shows that structures and agents operate in different timeframes and, as such, should be analysed separately to give due attention to the potential for activating powers, thus giving the notion of agency real meaning and power. Interaction between the concepts of culture(s), structure(s) and agency then becomes possible, avoiding the three forms of 'conflation' that Archer (2000) critiques:

> *strong tendencies, rooted in classical sociology, either to let the 'parts' dominate the 'people' (downwards conflation), or alternatively, to allow the 'people' to orchestrate the 'parts' (upwards conflation) [p1]... Central conflation, where elision occurs in the 'middle'... autonomy is withheld from* both levels *because they are held to be mutually constitutive.* (Archer, 2000, p1 and p6, emphasis in original)

This distinction is particularly useful for the current study, where, following Sayer (2000) it is argued that the structure and powers of probation exist in the UK higher education system irrespective of probationary academics' knowledge and understandings of such a system. Mutual constitution implies equal and opposite force between culture(s) or structure(s) and agency which leads to what Archer (1995) terms 'morphostatis', an enduring form of cultural or structural reproduction.

Culture(s) and structure(s) are important influences on the socialisation processes of new academics subject to probationary demands. To suggest that they determine outcomes for individuals, however, is to deny the potential for agency, or:

> *the tension between being conditioned to do things one way but being able to conceive of doing them differently* (Archer, 1996: xxiv-xxv).

Agency, the deliberative action of individuals (Archer, 1996), influences new academics' interactions with the cultural and structural systems at play in the institutions they join. This section of the chapter, therefore, focuses on agentic behaviour, and in particular the literature that looks at the formation of academic identities. Identity formation is taken here to mean a combination of the individual and the collective (Lawler, 2008). This view owes rather more to a sociological view of identity and socialisation, rather than a psychologised one, by locating individuals in cultural and social structures (Merton, 1968). The norms and values of these structures will influence, but not determine, individuals' experiences of them although, as Archer (2008a) demonstrates, some fundamental and intractable attributes such as age, gender or ethnic origin may be experienced as determining. Identity, in this context, is not taken to mean a unitary entity.

It is at the level of individuals' interaction with the culture(s) and structure(s) of contemporary UK universities that this work has been conducted. Following Clegg's notion of *'principled, personal autonomy'* (2008: 343), the new academics involved in this study cannot be seen to be passive recipients of the culture(s) and structure(s) that operate in their working contexts. Agency, construed here as the exercise of deliberative action on the part of an individual, is the third and final layer to play a role in an exploration of the academic probationary period (APP). The potential for agency always exists for new academic staff, whether exercised or not (Sayer, 2000).

These difficulties – of conventional versus contemporary conceptions of academic roles and the nature of disciplines – can be problematic unless there is recognition that cultural practices can differ widely (Merton, 1968). In his account of a theory of deviance, Merton (1968) shows how access to, or disbarment from, cultural and social norms and practices can induce a limited range of responses by individuals to their environments. In recognising the not always congruent relationship between cultural goals and social structures (pp:186-187) he shows how imbalances in

different directions are apt to produce certain behaviours, including conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion (p.194).

The idea of conformity, whilst important in this thesis, was of limited interest to Merton, whose work was focused on exploring deviant behaviour. The notion of a ritual response as one where:

> *one rejects the cultural obligation to attempt "to get ahead in the world," though one draws in one's horizons, one continues to abide almost compulsively by institutional norms.* (Merton, 1968: 204)

can easily be seen amongst those who took part in Davies and Petersen's (2005) study. The disillusion with what has become valued in Australian HE is palpable, but a strong desire to avoid the contemporary game is clearly evident. It is perhaps more difficult to locate the ritual response amongst the new academics in this study, simply because of their relatively short time in post. That is not to suggest that this kind of ritual response may not be what underlies the valuing of some activities over others by probationers who can be seen, even quite early in their careers, to prioritise some aspects of their role over others.

> *It presupposes alienation from reigning goals and standards. These come to be regarded as purely arbitrary.* (Merton, 1968: 209).

As Lawler (2008) suggests, developing identities is a fluid process of co-construction in a variety of social situations and understood, in Western tradition, as encompassing both individualised and collectivised elements. The implication of this view for the current study is that my focus can only be on the individual performance of (aspects of) an identity in a very specific social situation – the research interview – that needs to stand as a proxy for actual probationary experiences. This is not to suggest that the 'performance' referred to in this context is in any way inauthentic. It is simply recognition that the specific setting of a (recorded) research interview is a co-constructed event, a report or reflection on experience.

If initial professional development is contested territory in contemporary higher education, recent literature perhaps points to a potential source of some of these troubles. The notion of a liminal space, as first developed by the social anthropologist Turner (1969), signifies a temporal, transitional space where an individual is transformed through collective ritual. Extrapolating this idea to higher education, Meyer and Land (2003; 2005) suggest a liminal space can accompany episodes of significant learning that lead to a transformed way of understanding. Liminality can be characterised by periods of oscillation between states or statuses – the becoming and being of new academics. In some instances, however, the challenges encountered in remaking an identity, of achieving the desired transformation, may be experienced particularly acutely. In this case, loss and uncertainty may predominate, leading to the adoption of a pre-liminal stance (Meyer and Land, 2008).

A pre-liminal stance is a space, temporal rather than geographical, where experimenting with fluidity in identity can offer more loss than gain, and change can be rejected. Whilst most research in relation to this idea has been centred on the formal undergraduate curriculum (Meyer and Land, 2006) where a challenging conceptual difficulty is the stimulus to liminality, there is potential for applying this thinking to informal and/or professional learning contexts. *'[T]acit presumptions'* as Perkins (2006:40) argues, *'can operate like conceptual submarines that learners never manage to detect or track'* and can unsettle probationary academics who may yet have to fully internalise the rules of the UK academic game.

The transitional nature of probation which can extend to a maximum of four years, is an opportunity to develop an academic identity. Where identity is not unduly troubled due to a continuation of previous identities and experiences – in other words, ontological security (Giddens, 1984) is maintained – challenges through the new demands of initial professional development through a PGCert is likely to be straightforward. Where existing views about identity may be disturbed through a discontinuity in norms and practice, and especially where a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) is missing, the liminal space becomes a useful lens through which to understand how academic identities are constructed. As Perkins (2006) asserts, the '*underlying game'* of tacit knowledge may be prevalent in conceptions of higher

education. which can be unremarkable for some, whilst for others they may exacerbate discontinuities.

The idea of a liminal space (Meyer and Land, 2003; 2005), and the related phenomenon of the *'underlying game'* (Perkins, 2006) play an invaluable role in drawing together both formal and informal learning and its role in identity formation for new academics. Certainly, Perkins (2006) and Meyer and Land (2003; 2005) point towards contemplating the '*being'* aspects of an academic identity together with the '*knowing'* aspects. Whilst there is evidence of increasingly diverse staff appointments (Archer, 2008a), to an increasing diversity of staff roles, it still remains a primary function of most academics to teach, and this appears to be the space where formal learning dominates.

Assumptions in critical realism

Some fundamental assumptions pertain to critical realism which together shape the position that has been adopted in this thesis. First, critical realism takes a position on the nature of knowledge, where it is accepted that objects, structures and powers exist irrespective of our knowledge of them. A second assumption is that power is not exercised only in one direction. Archer (1996: xvi) argues for *'analytic dualism'* in order to give equal analytic attention to '*parts'* and to '*people'*. This contrasts with Giddens' (1984) assertion of '*duality'* of structure and agency, which suggests a mutual constitution. Third, critical realism rejects what Bhaskar (1978: 44) called the epistemic fallacy, '*that ontological questions can always be rephrased as epistemological ones'*.

This suggests that what Archer calls a *'continuous sense of self'* (2000: 77) is often underprivileged in explanations of individuals' behaviour in favour of the epistemic positions of the rational. The difficulty of rendering ontological questions in epistemic terms is the denial of emotion, motivation and intent, and the roles these may play in the choices people make. A fourth important assumption in critical realism is its promotion of a *'stratified ontology of reality'*:

> *First, the real is whatever exists, be it natural or social, regardless of whether it is an empirical object for us, and whether we happen to have an adequate understanding of its nature. Secondly, the real is the realm of objects, their structures and powers... Whereas the real in this definition refers to the structures and powers of objects, the actual refers to what happens if and when those powers are activated, to what they do and what eventuates when they do, such as when... the previously idle person does some work.* (Sayer, 2000: pp11-12)

Structural and cultural norms and conventions would fit this description of two layers of critical realism's stratified ontology. In taking the stance in this thesis that probation exists irrespective of the level of knowledge about it that probationary academics display, it must therefore be acknowledged that such individuals retain the power and potential to exercise a range of responses in addressing the situation they find themselves in. Davies and Petersen (2005) for instance, appear to deny the '*actual'* level in critical realism's stratified ontology, by privileging the '*real'* of the neo-liberal discourse that dominates current discourses of higher education systems, giving a sense of Archer's (2000) notion of downwards conflation.

The final significant assumption in critical realism is that knowledge of the social world is fallible and contingent because our access to it is at the level of experience, and therefore incomplete:

> *The empirical is defined as the domain of experience, and insofar as it refers successfully, it can do so with respect to either the real or the actual though it is contingent (neither necessary nor impossible) whether we know the real or the actual. While we may be able to observe things... as well as what happens when they act, some structures may not be observable. Observability may make us more confident about what we think exists, but existence itself is not dependent on it.* (Sayer, 2000:12)

In this respect, critical realism aims to establish necessary conditions under which potential powers may be activated, rather than accept uni- or bi-directional analyses. The agent, therefore, regains power to act, and does so (Clegg, 2008), whether or not this impinges on the structure(s) under which they operate. Such choices are made under a regime of *'constraints and enablements'* (Archer, 1996) that can only impinge if they '*stand in a relationship such that it obstructs or aids the achievement of some specific agential enterprise'* (Archer, 2003: 5)

The five assumptions elaborated above:

- of a world independent of our knowledge about it;
- the need for analytic duality so that neither the parts nor the people are overly privileged;
- a need to avoid the epistemic fallacy by rendering ontological concerns as epistemic ones;
- the promotion of a stratified ontology of reality where there is an acknowledgement of powers and actions that may be divorced from experience; and
- where our experience of the world, and therefore the nature of knowledge, is incomplete and contingent

inform the methodological and analytic approach adopted in this study. The intention to focus on the APP in this study has privileged a range of factors that impact on early academic careers. Becher and Trowler (2001) and Trowler and Knight (2000) suggest both discipline and department are fundamental to this process. A review of this literature, however, shows that discipline and department should not necessarily be equated, suggesting that departments, rather than potentially the most productive locus of appropriate induction (Trowler and Knight (2000), can, in and of themselves, be a source of difficulty. Formally or informally, the assumed '*community of practice'* (Wenger, 1998) may also be found wanting in this regard.

Summary

Structures, in the guise of mentoring, PGCerts, policies and departmental organisation, may serve some new lecturers but not others. In trying to offer a form of initial professional development that treats all participants in the same way, the reliance on narrow models with a tendency to reproduce, rather than challenge the purposes of higher education (Haggis, 2003; 2009) and the potential to be instrumental (Clegg, 2009) may lead participants to the view that conformity rather than rebellion (Merton, 1968) is required and rewarded. Questions then arise as to whether departmental conditions, and their relationship to institutional provision, are conducive or otherwise to the socialisation experience of new academics.

How particular conceptions of professional learning influence academic socialisation constitute the relationship between formal structure, policy and the probation process. Where the conceptions of an individual participant align with institutional provision, it can be speculated that PGCerts might be experienced positively. However, if there remain contestations (as both Haggis, 2009 and Clegg, 2009 suggest) about what constitutes professional knowledge (Eraut, 1994), or even whether a further layer of professionalism is indeed required (Dearing, 1997), this new and growing requirement of probationary academics may pose uncomfortable conflicts. Rather than evaluative work, the questions in this study sought to ascertain the role and impact of PGCerts rather more obliquely, as part of the general socialisation process.

The final set of influences investigated in this study was to do with how new academics assert their identities (Archer, 2008a and b; Clegg, 2008). Processes and structures are not static: they develop incrementally over time. But in the case of universities, such change can be slow. At the outset of this study, it was speculated that the learning curves of the individuals involved would be most amenable to study in terms of learning and development. This is not to negate the suggestion that such experiences do not feed back into the systems that produce them and effect change. However, it is assumed that those in the probationary system are least likely, in the broader picture of higher education, to be able to access and/or see such effects in a short timescale. And it is this short timescale

that is one of the defining features of this study: it is not deterministic of career path or trajectory (Ruth, 2008). In this respect, it was for participants in this study to determine the individual identity work (Lawler, 2008) they felt they were undertaking during their probationary periods.

To gain insight into experiences of academic probation, it is argued here that it is necessary to consider the three layers of culture, structure and agency, and to examine the interaction between them. The most useful model of academic cultures in a UK context stems from Becher and Trowler's (2001) exploration of academic tribes and territories, for its investigation into academic practices. It is recognised, however, that in contemporary higher education, more emphasis is now being placed on interdisciplinary ways of working, and that institutional cultures will also exert influence on the organisation of academic work. Culture is not assumed to be given, but constructed, but that forms of culture exist and pre-date the probationary academic's engagement with it (Archer, 1996).

Similarly, structures are in place that condition the activities of probationary academics. The most overt of such structures is the probationary period itself; subsumed into this are the structures that govern, for instance, research and teaching performance. These structures work within institutional cultures, but, as Trowler and Cooper (2002) suggest, may be at odds with them. Wider societal structuring may also play a role, in their conditioning effects. Gendered patterns and assumptions (Clegg, 2010) for instance, have the potential to influence career trajectories towards 'local' or 'cosmopolitan' views (Gouldner, 1957).

Individuals interact with the cultural and structural influences summarised above, and do so in an agentic fashion, i.e. they will consider a range of courses of action available to them, given their understandings of a situation. New academics may perceive the immediate demands of probation as '*a constraint or an enablement'* (Archer, 2003: 5). It is the exercise of agency, however, that leads to differentiated, rather than predictable outcomes (Archer, 1996). Deeply embedded within agentic behaviour is the idea of identity, seen here as a product of individual and collective influences, fluid and always a work in progress (Taylor, 2008). Prior experiences will, therefore, impact on individuals' responses to probation and here the idea of

liminality (Meyer and Land, 2003) enables a connection to be made between biography and a new learning environment.

It is argued here that there is little in contemporary British higher education literature that examines academic probation. Various strands of literature deal with separate aspects of practice for early career academics, such as learning to teach (Ramsden, 2003), research (Lucas, 2006) and publication (Becker, 1986). An important and well-developed area of work concerns PGCert course evaluation (Bamber, 2009; Prosser *et al.,* 2006). The focus on the structural level of the course does not always foreground the wider social context and may thus not make connections at Archer's (1995) structural elaboration level.

The temporal sequence of Archer's (1995) morphogenetic approach is a useful tool to apply to an investigation of the structure of academic probation. It acknowledges pre-existing rules and norms under which new academics are appointed and expected to perform. A second stage in this model focuses on interaction – the time individuals spend actively interacting with the structural rules and norms. A final stage, structural elaboration, can provide insights into how understandings are developed that then feed back into a new morphogenetic cycle, showing how structures are changed or reproduce themselves.

Utilising this framework allows an interrogation of various facets of the APP: formal, informal, cultural, structural and agentic. The '*parts'* and the '*people'* (Archer, 1996) can thus be distinguished, to give greater insights into the interactions that produce probationary experiences.

Chapter 3: Narratives and themes

> *It is not always clear at the beginning of a research project what features of speech will prove to be essential. I discourage students from tightly specifying a question that they will answer with data from narrative accounts because analytic induction, by definition, causes questions to change and new ones to emerge* (Riessman, 1993: 60).

This chapter considers methodological issues and positioning, addresses the ethical issues involved in this work, and gives details of the participants and the processes used to undertake this study. Epistemological and ontological issues are considered first, in order to demonstrate a degree of reflexivity about the nature of data and research relationships. Ethical practices and concerns are then given attention, before turning to the mechanics of the study: sample, recruitment and data collection. I explain my sources of data and analytic methods, and finally evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of my approach to this study.

Epistemological and ontological considerations

Researcher positioning

This study can be seen as curious mix of 'insider' and 'outsider' research for the reasons given in Chapter 1. Robson (2002: 382) outlines the benefits of '*insider research'* where access and contextual knowledge can facilitate research. He also points to the drawbacks of maintaining confidentiality, status relationships and the potential for maintaining any sense of objectivity. For precisely these latter reasons, I discounted undertaking an evaluative study (Cresswell, 2007) and therefore purposefully avoided collecting any data relating to PGCerts or individuals' assessment performance (although in this respect, some participants volunteered views – see the following chapters).

As an ‘insider’ researcher (Robson, 2002) – a probationary academic myself – I could exploit contextual knowledge. This also extended to my professional role, as someone who teaches on a PGCert and perhaps having some insight into the role these programmes are often designed to play for other new academics. As Sayer (2000) suggests, this represents the ‘*double hermeneutic’* of considering my own position, whilst simultaneously appreciating the position of others.

Concerns about status, confidentiality and objectivity (Robson, 2002) led also to consideration of an ‘outsider’ position, where my contextual knowledge would be far more limited. This was achieved by researching contexts other than my own institution. The benefit of this particular aspect of the research reported here is that respondents included in the study were, to some extent, able to view me as an ‘outsider’ – not someone who could be conceived of as in a position of power or authority in relation to their own current circumstances. As Riessman (1993: 5) suggests, data can be collected and analysed, that give *‘prominence to human agency and imagination’* outside the bounds of commonly-understood power relationships. My point here is to acknowledge that there remain uneven perceptions of power between researcher and researched (Gready, 2008) and that attempts to flatten such hierarchies stand in relation to insider/outsider status that cannot be fully overcome in a study such as this.

The nature of data in this study

Riessman in the quote that opens this chapter, raises two issues that were key to this study. First, she points out that over-specification of a research question is the enemy of inductive research. Second, she highlights the propensity for interviewees to ‘*hold the floor for lengthy turns and sometimes organize replies into long stories’* (1993:3).

Having been unable to locate a published study focusing on the UK academic probationary period (APP), I concluded that a hypothesis-driven study was unwise. Similarly, a phenomenographic study (Marton and Saljo, 1976; Prosser *et al.,* 2006) presupposes a limited number of *‘qualitatively different’* (Marton and Saljo, 1976) understandings of a specific phenomenon that does not sit easily with the stratified

ontology of critical realism (Sayer, 2000) where the concept of agency, realised or not, requires close examination. In response to these difficulties of conceptualising how a study of probationary experiences could be undertaken, I was initially drawn to the notion of '*narrative inquiry'* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). These authors suggest that *'narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience'* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000: 18). Acquiring narrative accounts, as suggested by Riessman (1993) above, is not difficult. The sense-making aspect of narrative data is, however, much more contested, and always bounded by the researcher's perspective. As Riessman (1993: 64) suggests: '*Narrativization assumes point of view'* on behalf of both parties, and this point is returned to in the section devoted to evaluation of method towards the end of this chapter.

As a methodological approach, collecting narratives gives rise to many contested meanings of the term narrative. Some, such as Riessman (1993) usually argue for narrative to be conflated with story, displaying a beginning, a middle and an end, although she also acknowledges that other genres are open to interviewees. Cresswell (2007) defines narrative research as a specific approach in qualitative inquiries and points to its use in (auto)biographical studies. In this study, the focus was on personal experiences of, and responses to, a specific phenomenon – the APP – rather than a more general biographical account. The work of Polkinghorne is therefore key. He makes an important distinction where *'[T] purpose of narrative analysis is to produce stories as the outcome of research'* (1995:15) and the analysis of narratives whereby:

> *...researchers collect stories as data and analyze them with paradigmatic processes. The paradigmatic analysis results in descriptions of themes that hold across the stories or in taxonomies of types of stories, characters or settings.* (Polkinghorne, 1995: 12)

In investigating my research question regarding the key influences on the probation experiences of new academics, it became clear that there is currently a weak evidence base relating to much of this process. A good deal of existing work (Prosser *et al.,* 2006; Hanbury *et al.,* 2008; Ginns *et al.,* 2008) focuses only on the learning to teach aspect of the new academic's role. As identified in Chapter 1, the

focus on evaluating formal courses and qualifications can often pre-suppose distinct categories of a teacherly identity, some more sophisticated than others. As Clough (2002) suggests, contextualisation can be lost to published reports but not wishing to follow his line of fictionalising research encounters to produce provocative tales the approach taken here was to elicit *'experience-centred narrative'* (Squire, 2008). This form of data then becomes amenable to Polkinghorne's (1995: 13) suggestion for '*paradigmatic analysis'* to '*locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data'*. The focus is on new lecturers as they experienced the lived reality of the APP, and their accounts of this period in their professional lives.

An epistemological position

Enquiring after probationary experiences is a research topic that could be pursued in many ways. As noted above, however, I have been unable to locate any contemporary higher education studies that use probation as a frame of reference, suggesting that, without a strong literature base, a hypothesis-driven approach, most common in natural science but also used in social research (Sayer, 2000; Gomm, 2004) would be difficult to construct. Instead, a broad interpretivist stance (Cousin, 2009) was considered a productive line of enquiry. This approach enables interviewees to articulate their '*experience-centred narratives'* (Squire, 2008), albeit ones directed towards a particular topic (the APP) rather than general biographical accounts.

An inductive approach, where issues emerge from the data collected (Robson, 2002), present a variety of challenges to researchers. Representation (Van Maanen, 1988) and issues of power are chief amongst these. Some researchers, such as Clough (2002) aggregate 'stories' in the construction of fictional accounts that nevertheless contain important social meanings, whilst others, such as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) conduct narrative analyses that use a dramaturgical approach to highlight actors, scenes, events and plotlines.

In this study, I was concerned as far as possible to flatten the hierarchy implied in the researcher-researched relationship (Macfarlane, 2009) and was keen for

participants to interpret my occasional interview prompts as cues for story-telling (Riessman, 1993). The benefit of adopting an interview technique that values story-telling, as Clough (2002) reminds us, is that most research is, in a sense, story-telling anyway. Collecting stories through loosely-structured interviews is a process that participants respond to in various ways, with some more keen than others to '*hold the floor'* (Riessman, 1993: 3).

This study is not work of an overtly postmodern persuasion, but neither does it cling to a positivist position that would imply that there is a 'truth' to be discovered about contemporary probationary processes. Critical realism (Archer, 1995, 2003) offers a helpful middle way with its position *'that there is a world existing independently of our knowledge of it'* (Sayer, 2000: 2) that has structures with '*capacities to behave in particular ways'* (Sayer, 2000: 11). Such capacities are emergent properties, and may or may not be activated as people interact in complex, open systems.

Interaction, following Archer (1995), is a useful concept when applied to a study of the APP, as it enables a description of the context in which participants find themselves. The structures and cultures of employing departments and institutions do not determine the thoughts or actions of new academics, but play a role in conditioning their perceptions of, and responses to, probation. The emergent properties of such interactions are complex and messy (Trowler, 2010): it would be unrealistic to expect a 'neat' account of such research (McArthur, 2010).

The adoption of a longitudinal approach by interviewing participants up to three times across a year of their probationary periods enabled a good degree of interaction (Archer, 1996). My interest was in the interactions of new academics with the culture(s) and structure(s) of their departments and institutional requirements. From the probationer's perspective, the interview regime will have provided an opportunity to reflect on such interactions with someone they may simultaneously have perceived as an insider and outsider.

How this complex of roles and positions may have influenced the data can only be speculated upon and this can be seen to be a weakness of the study. A more generous view can suggest, however, that in conducting this work, I was armed with

a good understanding of a wide range of '*sensitising concepts'* (Blumer, 1954, cited in Robson, 2002) concerning probationary experiences. This position recognises interview respondents as knowledgeable agents (Giddens, 1984) in the interview process.

With the APP seemingly under-researched, my interest was in hearing people's stories as a way of beginning to understand probationary experiences. This is in contrast to specific, discrete 'event' centred stories (Labov, 1972, in Patterson, 2008). Whilst stories of probationary experience were my focus, the analytic moves that Clough (2002) adopts, to produce fictional aggregates felt uncomfortable. Whilst recognising the problems of any interview encounter as an exercise in power (Schostak, 2006), and of selectivity and interpretation (Riessman, 1993; 2008), different forms of interview style are available that enable or constrain the role of respondents. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) summarise three forms of interview encounter: the transfer of information, the transaction, and the interaction (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 267). These descriptions perhaps do not pay enough attention to the co-construction of an interview event (Riessman, 1993; 2008) or concerns about what will be done with interview data after the event (Squire, 2008). In this regard, researchers also need to consider ways of 'being' within this process.

An ontological position

Perceptual data can easily be critiqued for lacking a 'truth' quality, as many motivations may underlie the telling of experiential stories. Qualitative work can never escape this difficulty, but Archer (2000) argues strongly that a balance must be struck between over- or under-specifying agency in relation to the social world. Choices are made, and later explained or justified, in relation to an individual's perception of their situation which leaves the researcher to recognise and acknowledge:

> *the concept-dependence of social phenomena and the need to interpret meaningful actions* (Sayer, 2000: 27)

The importance of interpretation is foregrounded here, and I argue that an insider perspective, together with the commensurate awareness of sensitising concepts is sufficient to interrogate perceptual data. What this approach cannot do is to make truth claims or overt generalisations from such data; but neither did I wish to create fictions (Clough, 2002). In situating this work in a critical realist framework, my aim has been to explore the interactions between the new academics in this study, and their perceptions of the culture(s) and structure(s) they encountered. From here, I aspire to Sayer's (1992) '*practically adequate'* notion of research that can provide insights into the APP.

Being alert to emergence is a fundamental assumption in the critical realist framework. It was accepted that 'truth' cannot be established from perceptual data. Equally, it is accepted that structures are at play that condition experiences, and that these structures play a role whether or not the individuals involved in this work are aware of them. If, as Archer (2000) argues, structures logically pre-date interaction with them, then temporally, this work took place with new academics as they were attempting to realise what Giddens (1984) calls routinization:

> *Routinized practices are the prime expression of the duality of structure in respect of the continuity of social life. In the enactment of routines agents sustain a sense of ontological security.* (Giddens, 1984: 282)

He argues that people appreciate in great detail '*the conditions and consequences of what they do in their day-to-day lives'* and can offer a rational account of their actions (Giddens, 1984: 281). This view perhaps underplays the complexity of the new environment probationary academics find themselves in. A conception of 'duality of structure' (Giddens, 1984) perhaps presupposes a mutual constitution: that agency and structure might be interdependent, equally influential in shaping experiences of probation. It can be argued that an incomplete grasp of structures and rules – or a lack of 'routinized practices' (Giddens, 1984) – limits probationers' abilities to shape such structures.

This work details the *'emergent properties'* (Sayer, 2000) of individuals' interactions with institutional enactments of probation. It does so from a qualitative position that privileges agency and contingency but that does not dismiss the importance of culture(s) and structure(s). In contrast with a good deal of work that investigates the experiences of early career academics in a more psychologised fashion (for instance, that which is concerned with cognitive, conceptual change – Prosser *et al.,* 2006), the messy world of emotion has been admitted to the work.

To avoid undue subjectivity, Robson (2002) summarises the uses of triangulation that are intended to ensure qualitative, interview-based data can be seen as more robust. As noted above, the potentially negative connotations attached to '*outsider'* (Robson, 2002) evaluation work made efforts towards such triangulation feel uncomfortable in the course of this study. Andrews (2008) writes about interpretation of soft data, such as that gained through narrative interviews, as embodying the character of *'never the last word'*, suggesting that:

> *... our interpretations of our data are always, and can only ever be, connected to the vantage point from which we view the world. But we, and the world around us, are forever changing. Nor does the data we collect remain constant... Similarly, our field notes are but interpreted observations; they are intimately part of the person we were when we wrote them.* (Andrews, 2008: 86)

These observations resonate stongly with my reflections on the conduct of this study, and accord with Archer's (1995) temporal logic. In the chapters that follow, I hope to deal with interview data in a sensitive manner, to write the kind of coherent and persuasive (Riessman, 1993) account that can be of use to others working in this field. In incorporating the ontological dimension of becoming an academic in contemporary UK higher education, it thus follows that attention should be paid to the ethical dimension of this study. This is explored further in the following section, before I turn to the concrete details of participants and the methods used in this study.

Ethical issues

Ethics can be seen to be an obstacle prior to the 'doing' of research, and one encountered early in the process. There are normative codes of practice available to those new to the area of educational research (BERA, 2004; ESRC, 2010) which commonly inform institutional codes of conduct. These models often assume primacy, as they inform the institutional procedures that researchers must navigate in order to proceed with research (see, for instance, the Strathclyde Code of Practice, 2009), to comply with requirements. Such a process often derives *'from medical or bioethical review bodies'* (Israel and Hay, 2006) where risk is considered highest. Alternatively, consideration of ethics and ethical behaviour can be seen as a way of enhancing the quality of research practices (Macfarlane, 2009). In this section, I aim to reflect on ethical principles and my conduct in this study.

One of the keenest issues in the conduct of ethical research is the power relationship between researcher and researched. In terms of educational research, this is most commonly felt when there is a direct teaching-learning-assessment relationship between participants. This study overcomes this particular difficulty by recruiting participants from universities across the UK where such a direct teaching-learning-assessment link did not exist in the vein of Robson's (2002) insider-outsider divide. That is not to say that the potential difficulties of a perceived power relationship did not exist.

Given the substantive topic of the research, and the existence of sometimes uncomfortable anecdote that inspired my interest in the topic in the first place, my main concern for the conduct of this research was to be aware of this power dynamic. As in any other study of this nature, ethical clearance was sought which considered a range of potential difficulties. Some assumptions are made in institutional processes (University of Strathclyde, 2009) – such as what constitutes a vulnerable group – that appear unproblematic but which in fact deserve greater consideration. In the chapters that follow, there is discussion of some very problematic transitions and difficulties faced by my group of interest: new academics. As members of this group are neither juvenile, elderly nor, for the most part, people with a declared physical or mental health disability, they are regarded

as constituting a group for whom no special concern needs to be exercised. Working age professionals are the group least specified in the '*medicalised'* codes of conduct that Israel and Hay (2006) suggest can dominate perceptions of institutional risk.

The range of difficult circumstances reported by participants in this study suggests that vulnerability can exist in other than conventionally understood groupings. The reports of stress levels that appear to border on mental or physical health difficulties, for instance, give rise to ethical concerns that a researcher can be dealing with a participant for whose experience she is not prepared. The simple process of informed consent (detailed below) is not necessarily an effective screening device. And by trying to negate any perceived abuse of power by interviewing respondents from a wide variety of outside institutions, local knowledge of sources of help for those about whom concern was raised during the interview process is not available. This leads to questions and implications for my personal ethical conduct, when I could do no more but to listen and leave.

It is reasonable to suggest, of course, especially in the light of knowledge of the sometimes discomfiting anecdote referred to above, that there should be no surprise in the emotionality of some of the stories I was told. But perhaps I had not been prepared, especially in the early days of interviewing, for such strength of feeling to be on display. It has, of course, in the light of analysis, proved to be a valuable source of conceptualising this research. The discomfort remains, however, that by not starting out with an idea that participants could indeed be vulnerable, the research process has equated to a brief counselling or therapeutic encounter.

Undoubtedly, I indulged in the '*sanctioning'* behaviour described by Macfarlane (2009) where I felt my position was to elicit information, and not to 'judge' an interviewee. I could, therefore, be guilty of verbal and non-verbal cues that encouraged narratives with which I did not agree. This suggests perhaps that I prioritised the gaining of information over other concerns, and that would be an accurate conclusion to reach. The '*problem of hearability'* (Blommaert, 2000 cited in Gready, 2008: 139) can lead to '*narrative appropriation'* (Gready, 2008: 139) and its subsequent potential misrepresentation in research reports. In the findings chapters

that follow, I have tried as far as possible to present segments of the narratives where I have resisted the temptation of the researcher who *'snips away at the flow of talk'* (Riessman, 1993: 13) in order not to take information out of context.

I was as explicit as possible in seeking informed consent before recruiting participants to the study. My participant information/informed consent sheet is attached as Appendix 1. This sets out what I aimed to do; what I required by way of time commitment; and how the data so gathered would be treated. When participants volunteered to take part in the study, this is the first thing they were sent along with an email suggesting they read it carefully to see what I was asking, before agreeing to go ahead. It was never the goal of this study that I was deliberately seeking out difficulty. I can only hope that the ethical mantra of doing no harm (Israel and Hay, 2006) has not been broken – though I am now more keenly aware of distressing personal situations. I hope these were never exacerbated by my research.

A key point here is that, however conscientiously ethical issues are considered in advance of conducting a study, what transpires as it progresses should equally be reflected on, and behaviour modified if needed. In this respect, as I returned for further interviews, whilst I felt I did not wish to change my interview style, I was keen to remind participants that the tape recorder could be switched off, and reiterated my promises of anonymity and confidentiality. Preserving the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents has led to some minor difficulties in reporting outcomes from the study. Quite rightly, journal reviewers are keen to know more details of the backgrounds of participants in order to ascertain that what is being reported is not unfair or unwarranted comparisons. This has proved a difficult obstacle: I had promised that specific disciplinary associations would not be made explicit. My response, therefore, has been to characterise those who took part within broadly cognate groups that would be familiar to academics in UK higher education (these are elaborated in the section on study sample, below).

It has also been the case that what transpired in interview – as noted above about the emotive dimension of some of the language used – has given rise to ethical issues, and these issues are explored further in the following chapters as

appropriate. For now, I simply reflect on the difficulties of encountering certain practices that made me uncomfortable (Gready, 2008). Above all, given the assurances of anonymity and confidentiality that I gave, I was profoundly aware that there was nothing I could do to change material circumstances. In some ways, this can be seen as being complicit in the continuation of unfortunate practices.

To highlight ethical issues within this population I reflected that raising awareness of such potential difficulties was the only appropriate action I could take. This has taken the form of disseminating findings through conference presentations and journal papers, which have sought to trouble some of the practices I encountered. Dissemination can perhaps alert others to think more carefully about policies and structures within their own institutions; certainly it has made me more keenly aware of how my own practices and the policies within my own institution may play a role in perceived power structures (Archer, 1996) that are dictated by more powerful others (Gready, 2008). It has also proved a timely reminder that, ethically, in studies of this nature, I need in future to give more thought in advance to encountering unexpected difficulties and how I will deal with them.

There is a positive side to developing longer-term relationships with participants. The longitudinal approach has allowed me to see the sometimes distressing situations referred to above gradually evolve and be resolved over time. And I was also asked, on two occasions, for advice related to the conduct of small projects study participants needed to undertake for their PGCerts. There were also numerous other minor questions and requests that arose during interview. Having established more than a fleeting relationship with respondents, I was happy to help with such questions and requests, always, of course, outlining any limitations to my advice. There is, for instance, a considerable difference between being asked to explain the UK's external examiner system, and being asked for advice on the conduct of qualitative interviews. Rather than cause difficulties for the ethical conduct of this work, I believe that such requests, and dealing positively with them, are illustrative more of positive relationships rather than an unbalanced exercise of power.

As is clear from the informed consent form participants were asked to read and sign, anonymity and confidentiality were important concerns. For this reason, it is made clear in the chapters that follow where extracts from interview have been used. These quotes, however, are not explicitly attributed to individuals. Individuals, institutions and disciplines are detailed only in a generic sense where necessary. There is an abstracted table of the characteristics of participants in the sampling section, below, simply to denote the reach of this work, and some further references in reporting respondents in specific analytic categories.

Finally, in this section, I can confirm that I have paid due regard to ethical conventions. Some participants in this study requested copies of their interview transcripts, and these have been made available. Others requested sight of the results of the work. A copy of journal papers accepted for publication were sent to those who expressed interest in knowing the outcomes of the study; participants were requested to reconfirm interest in receiving a copy of any further published findings, or indeed of the thesis itself. These commitments are important to me, and are being honoured on an ongoing basis. I hope, therefore, that I have been respectful to those who gave their time to undertaking this study.

Study sample

Included in the data that constitutes this research are 60 transcripts with 23 new academics from 11 separate institutions and a range of disciplines, representing interviews carried out over the academic years 2006/07 (pilot study), 2007/08 and 2008/09 (main study). A brief demographic summary is presented in Table 3.1.

	Pre-1992		Post-1992	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
STEM	6	4	1	
Social Sciences	4	4	3	1
Totals	10	8	4	1

Table 3.1: Summary demographics of study participants (STEM = Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths)

As noted above, this work does not make a claim to representativeness amongst the myriad of variables potentially available to a study of this type. The aim has been to group individuals who participated in this study in ways that would be commonly recognised in UK higher education for ease of reporting the findings, and with due regard to maintaining confidentiality. Contextual features that distinguish disciplines and sectors are referred to in broad terms in the findings chapters that follow.

It is important to recognise the potential for bias in a self-selecting, opportunistic sample that constitutes this study. (Further information on methods of recruitment can be found in the following section). One common criticism that pertains to opportunistic sampling that I have anticipated is that those who volunteered to take part would have a particular motivation for doing so. This difficulty, which is unavoidable in self-selecting samples, may be seen to produce skewed data. For this reason, no volunteer was excluded from the study, which resulted in a sample with varying backgrounds, lengths of experience, and different disciplinary and institutional homes. Of the 23 participants, 18 were in their first year of probation; of the remaining 5 respondents, two were in their third and final year (one going into a fourth year of probation) and three in their second. From this, it can be seen that many volunteered very early in their probationary periods and it seems reasonable to assume that their ideas regarding the APP may not necessarily have been well-formed.

For others, of course, who participated later in their probationary period with far more experience of the APP, the criticism of potential bias may well be valid. Those with unproblematic experiences may have assumed that the general topic of this study was unnecessary, and thus not volunteered to take part. This suggests a potential skew in the data towards participants who may have 'an axe to grind'. To address this issue, it is indicated in analysis where data is presented from those later in the probationary process.

Recruitment

The group that constitutes 'new academics' is not necessarily easy to identify. Whilst HESA data (2011) can give an overall picture with regards to academic employment, it remains impossible to ascertain with any certainty the constitution of my target group. Of primary concern was to recruit participants in their first academic post and subject to academic probation, as noted in the introductory chapter. In acknowledging that representativeness was unachievable, a voluntaristic, convenience sample based on self-selection was used in this study. My process for recruiting volunteers, along with an appreciation of its deficiencies, is detailed in this section.

Initially, a small pilot study was undertaken in the academic year 2006-07 which involved five participants from two institutions who were recruited via an email circulated by two personal contacts. The individuals who responded contacted me directly to express their interest in the study and preserve their confidentiality. As this strategy was successful in attracting responses from my target group, I needed to find a mechanism to scale up the study that did not simply rely on personal contacts.

One route I considered was to approach universities' Human Resources departments. This, however, I discounted, firstly because the study may have been construed as some form of institutionally-sanctioned work, which is not how I wished the work to be represented. Second, I felt there was a risk that such an approach may take the form of a blanket invitation to participate for new employees, regardless of form of contract. To ensure, as far as I could, that only my target

group was approached, it made sense to actively target those required to undertake a PGCert, which is commonly the province (Gosling, 2010) (though not necessarily exclusively) of new academic staff.

To achieve this targeting, the Heads of Educational Development Group (HEDG) was approached to publicise the study. An email was sent to the group, facilitated by the then Chair, requesting that they pass on details of the study to those enrolled on their PGCerts, in order that the target group could be reached. Those in receipt of the email were thus free to act on it in any way they saw fit. The request made it clear that those who fitted the condition of being ‘probationary academics’ in their first academic post should approach me directly to ensure anonymity. As some institutions in the UK are not represented on this list, not every new academic would have had the opportunity of volunteering to take part, even if they had so wished. It is also acknowledged that not every member of the HEDG list would necessarily have distributed the request, further limiting the pool of new academics on which to draw. This request was repeated once in order to capture those new academics who took up post later in the year.

This approach clearly relies on the goodwill of others to, firstly, think that such a study is worthwhile and, secondly, to promote it within their institutions, a potential difficulty given how it might conflict with their own evaluation activities. Needless to say, I am grateful to those who did promote the study, and those who considered themselves to fit the parameters and thus chose to volunteer. It must be stressed, then, that this is an opportunistic sampling regime, with all the inherent difficulties noted above that go with this approach. These issues are revisited and discussed further in the section on evaluation of method towards the end of this chapter.

Data collection

The overall design of this study, by taking a longitudinal approach, was predicated on conducting three face-to-face interviews across one year of the probationary period with participants. As noted above, the pilot study was conducted with five new academics from two institutions. Three participants in the pilot study were asked to engage in two interviews, one at the beginning of the academic year, and

one at the end, whilst the remaining two also undertook a third, interim, interview, scheduled in the second semester. The aim of the pilot study was not only to trial the interview schedules (Gomm, 2004) but also to ascertain whether the regime of two or three interviews should be pursued.

In transcribing and analysing the data from the pilot study, it became clear that participants who had undertaken the three-interview design were articulating greater understandings of the culture(s) and structure(s) they were encountering in the space of one semester. It seemed likely, therefore, that capturing data from three points would facilitate greater insight into the nature of the temporal interactions (Archer, 1995) that probationers experience. Building on the experience of the pilot study, the three-interview design was pursued as the ideal model for the main study with 18 probationary academics from a further 9 institutions.

Interview schedules are attached as Appendix 2. These are the schedules used for both the pilot study and the main study. The main body of data was collected in academic years 2007-2008 and 2008-2009. In recruiting participants, it was made clear that I would undertake the necessary travel in order not to inconvenience participants, and that interview times and dates would be determined by them, within my overall framework for timely data collection.

Interviews were scheduled for early in the new academic year (October/November), a mid-point around semester two (February/March,) and finally at the end of the academic year in June/July, negotiated as far as possible to occur after the examination boards for the courses in which participants were involved. The goal of this schedule was to maximise the opportunity to access perceptions of the academic role in line with the cycles of the academic year. This, of course, is an idealised model, and the actual conduct of the study varied slightly. Some volunteers did not take up post until the second semester of the academic year, and therefore undertook their first and second interviews at the nominal second and third interview points, and thus the 'first' interview at the beginning of a new academic year. For those in institutions where one year of probation was the norm, it was not unusual that the final interview in the series was conducted beyond their official one year (i.e: 12 months' employment) probationary period.

Each of the interviews was digitally recorded and fully transcribed, except for one interviewee in the pilot study, who requested that no recording be taken, and a further interview in the pilot study where the recording failed. Thus, nine transcribed recordings and two sets of contemporaneous notes were available from the pilot study, and 51 transcribed recordings from the main study. These transcripts form the primary data source for analysis in this study. Alongside this primary data however, brief notes were captured after first interviews with participants. I note below exceptions to this description of the conduct of the study, and elaborate on my additional sources of data.

Anomalies in data collection

Most of the new academics who began this study stayed with the process until the end. For those who did not, I provide here a brief summary of the circumstances concerning drop-out or non-completion rates. To maintain the confidentiality of participants, I do not relate these circumstances directly back to the summary of respondents.

Four participants from the main study did not provide a second interview. Two were ultimately not available on the date that had been agreed for me to visit their campuses, one had indicated in advance that an overseas field trip would preclude this stage, and one had already left his university. Two did not provide a final interview (the one participant who had already left academic life) and one more who had taken paternity leave. Three participants in the pilot study were asked to undergo an alternative regime of only two interviews – one at the start and one at the end of the academic year. This explanation constitutes the difference in the number of interviews actually conducted as opposed to those that might be expected given the study design.

Sources

Interviews

The primary dataset for this study are the transcripts of 60 interviews and two limited sets of contemporaneous notes from the 23 participants in this study. Interviews were estimated in advance to be of an hour's duration, and this was specified in service of the notion of informed consent. In reality, they took between 40 minutes and two hours. The shortest interviews were provided by the respondent who did not wish to be recorded, and one other, a male scientist who, as Squire (2008) suggests, may have felt uncomfortable with the narrative style adopted. Four male respondents, however, appeared to enjoy the experience of a more conversational encounter, and consistently provided interviews of more than 90 minutes' duration.

Recordings were taken with the express permission of interviewees (see Appendix 1, and which was reiterated at the beginning of each encounter), using, on each occasion, a small number of prompts. I aimed for a '*conversational approach'* (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000) as far as possible, although this tends to privilege certain communicative preferences over others. Squire warns that such an approach can disadvantage some: '*men [are], as in many interview studies, less likely to volunteer'* (Squire, 2008: 48), but this was not the experience in this study, which attracted more male interviewees than women.

However, it should be noted that the transcripts themselves do not embody the totality of the interview experience. Whilst interviews were transcribed as faithfully as possible (i.e. including pauses, laughs, etc.) an interview constitutes more than can be represented by text on a page. The *'... fragments, contradictions and gaps'* noted by Squire (2008: 43) can be equally important in conceptualising the experience of an interview.

Where interviews were interrupted, for instance, this is noted in transcripts. The transcript carries no information on the nature of the interruption (the recorder was turned off). As Andrews (2008) suggests, whilst the data presented in the following

chapters is indeed drawn from transcribed interview data, it is also informed by '*interpreted observations'* (Andrews, 2008: 86) in the form of direct observation of working environments and vicarious observation of participants' publicly-reported successes; these aspects are elaborated in the following two sub-sections of this chapter.

Observations

The data presented for analysis in the following chapters are taken exclusively from interview transcripts. However, as the research process entailed extensive and repeated travel to other university campuses, my understanding of the data is also shaped by *'interpreted observations'* Andrews (2008). These observations were compiled as a form of '*field texts... a flood of descriptively oriented field experience observations'* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000: 82), but in a far less extensive manner than those authors recommend. My notes, scribbled as soon as possible after initial interviews could more accurately be characterised as 'pen portraits', usually capturing personal details: recent background, demeanour, anything that seemed important that was said before (or most usually after) the recorder was switched off, what Robson (2002) calls the '*hand on the door'* phenomenon.

These notes were not added to on subsequent visits. However, it was not difficult to observe the changing working conditions of interviewees. There are no instances in first interviews of interruptions. As Riessman (1993) notes, transcription is a subjective and selective process. As I transcribed subsequent interviews, I chose to include reference to interruptions – whether by phone, student or colleague (when the recorder was switched off) – that became noticeable '*interpreted observations'* (Andrews, 2008) when detailed analysis took place on the transcripts some time later. I also gathered, though not deliberately, impressions of working environments, both office and campus (Cousin, 2003), a form of geo-spatial information that Sayer (2000) suggests is often ignored in social research.

A final, but minor, category of data in this study, that I did not explicitly aim to capture is what I will term vicarious observation, and this is explored briefly below.

Vicarious observation

This term reflects information, rather than data, that I have acquired inadvertently during the course of this study. By this, I mean those instances where I have noticed participants in this work becoming published authors, or having been awarded grants etc. Such milestones are pleasing to see or hear about, and, of course, have played a role as I worked with my data. It would be remiss to suggest that such public indicators have no bearing on how I came to view participants' career trajectories.

The idea of vicarious observation is perhaps a very real instance of Sayer's (2000) argument of social research as a form of '*double hermeneutics'*, and my positioning as simultaneously '*insider-outsider'* (Robson, 2002) within this study: on the one hand, a member of the community under study (probationary academics) and on the other, external to the sites and the contexts of the research.

These latter two categories (of physical and vicarious observation) are not drawn upon explicity in the analysis that follows but represent part of the *'tales of the field'* (Van Maanen, 1988) that are known but are selected out in the telling of any research story (Van Maanen, 1988; Riessman, 1993). Only in writing up this study have I returned to information seeking about my participants – to ascertain whether or not they remain in the post they occupied when the empirical phase of this work was undertaken; I have not sought to ascertain interviewees' progress in their academic careers to undertake an analysis – a revisiting of the data (Andrews, 2008) – that contains more than the original interview transcripts.

Method

In this section of the chapter, I explain my approach to the interview encounters that form the fundamental database for this study. As noted, above, incidental data and impressions were acquired during the course of this study; however, the dataset presented in analysis is limited to interview transcripts alone although it should be noted that some interpretation has likely been mediated by '*interpreted*

observations' (Andrews, 2008) that are now impossible to disentangle from the analytic process. The explanation of method is followed by a reflection on the longitudinal aspect of the study, before a consideration of the analytic technique applied to the data. Before summarising this chapter, I also offer an evaluation of my working methods and the limitations inherent in this approach.

Loosely-structured interviews

The interview encounters that encompass the primary data source for this study embody all the difficulties that Riessman (1993; 2008) alludes to. At every turn, the researcher makes decisions that influence the resultant transcript available for analysis:

> *Analysis cannot be easily distinguished from transcription... Close and repeated listenings, coupled with methodic transcribing, often leads to insights that in turn shape how we choose to represent an interview narrative in our text.* (Riessman, 1993: 60).

It is perhaps impossible for any reader of a qualitative research report to have full confidence in the story woven, in the knowledge that some data have been selected and other data ignored. Van Maanen (1988) in particular, details how ethnographic tales may be told that are rooted in the values and positioning that researchers bring to their studies. He distinguishes between realist, 'factual' accounts of early ethnographies, confessional ('heroic') tales and 'impressionistic' accounts that may have a tendency to prioritise drama and tension (Van Maanen, 1988). In a similar vein, Riessman (1993) proposes a five-stage model that highlights interpretive turns at every stage of narrative inquiry.

Relating to how a story is told and interpreted, Archer's (2003) notion of *'the internal conversation'* has resonance for both researched and researcher as this can make real the rather drier concerns of strict methodologists such as Miles and Huberman (1994) who Robson (2002: 483) critiques for their *'direct translation of concepts from quantitative analysis into qualitative analysis'*. Robson (2002), Riessman

(1993; 2008) and Archer (2003) along with Schostak (2006) tend to problematise the interview encounter, '*seeing the messiness of academic practice'* (Jones, 2011) and refuting the direct correspondence of language to meaning (Van Maanen, 1988). Archer's (2003) writing around the *'internal conversation'* makes clear that individuals are prone to '*different modes of reflexivity'* (p153). These issues render interview-based studies as always subject to a level of interpretation (Van Maanen, 1988; Riessman, 1993).

Whilst the willingness to *'hold the floor'* (Riessman, 1993: 3) differed between respondents in this study, I characterise the main method of data collection as loosely-structured narrative interviews. This corresponds with Archer's (2003) notions of *'social objectives'* and *'agential reflexivity'* that goes beyond Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2000) conceptions of interview encounters as information transmission or transaction. The aim in interviews was to:

> *'notic[e] the differences and diversity of people's behavior... attend[ing] to the temporal context and complex interaction of the elements that make each situation remarkable'* (Polkinghorne, 1995: 11).

As this was not a hypothesis-driven study, closed interviews (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000) were not appropriate. Semi-structured interviews, or open-ended ones in Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2000) terms, were also felt to be too forced, as they suggest that all the information to be elicited is determined in advance, even if the order of questions can be changed. This can be seen as a very controlled approach that may not accord participants enough latitude to take the interview in a direction of their choosing.

The '*interaction'* style of interview (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 267) is equated to a conversational encounter, which was my preferred style of interview conduct; the aim was to elicit experiences related to the APP, rather than more general life histories (Cresswell, 2007) so this demanded an idea of ground to be covered. For this reason, a number of open prompts were devised for the interview schedules (bearing in mind the potential chronological sequencing of a longitudinal

approach) that were used to guide, but not dictate, interview encounters. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) maintain that this approach can ensure systematic data collection and that gaps in data can be anticipated. On the other hand, my sympathies lie with Polkinghorne (1995: 11) who suggests that individuals' *'[n]arrative reasoning does not reduce itself to rules and generalities across stories'* and that there is no single understanding of a particular phenomenon that can be transmitted in the interview context. In this respect, I conducted my interviews in recognition of Archer's (2003) notion that '*agential reflexivity'* would determine how my prompts were interpreted.

As in any study of this nature, however, the longitudinal aspect, and the stories that were told (Squire, 2008) did not necessarily fit into clean transcriptions and analyses (Riessman, 1993), and that inductive research is always prone to the 'interpretive turns' (Riessman, 1993; Van Maanen, 1988) that are not always made explicit in the stories that social researchers construct. In this respect, I hope I have avoided the pitfalls of the '*realist', 'confessional'* and '*impressionistic'* tales that Van Maanen (1988) critiques, and given due regard to the '*agential reflexivity'* that (Archer, 2003) suggests is a firmer basis for analysing qualitative data.

Longitudinality

There appears to be a limited number of higher education research studies that take a longitudinal approach to data collection. Notable exceptions are UK based studies by Sadler (2008), who used staged interviews to gauge developing beliefs about teaching, Archer (2008a and b) who focused on developing an authentic academic identity, and Sutherland, internationally (2010) whose interest is in the research and publication patterns of early-career academics. In this respect, therefore, this study can be conceived of as departing somewhat from the norm of a single sampling regime (Prosser *et al.,* 2006; Warnes, 2008; Donnelly, 2006; Becher, 1989).

Given some institutions' three-year probationary period, a number of participants underwent the interview process when they had acquired experience of the processes and rhythms of the academic year once or twice, or even (in the case of

one participant whose probation was extended) three times. Direct comparison of participants' responses over periods of time is, therefore, unattainable due to uncontrollable vagaries in timing and sequence of appointments and activities. The issues arising from longitudinal interviewing appear to be rarely commented on by social researchers. Narrative analysts, such as Andrews (2008), write of '*revisiting data'*, returning to old datasets for new interpretations

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), on the other hand, suggest that longitudinal studies tend to focus on demographics or formal educational testing, whilst ethnographers (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Van Maanen, 1988) tend to equate longitudinality to time spent in the field. Archer (2008a and b) and Sadler (2008) refer to multiple sampling points in their research, but the difficulties that may be associated with analysing this aspect of data do not appear to be well elaborated, perhaps signifying the relative absence of longitudinal studies within higher education studies. These difficulties aside, the longitudinal aspect of this research, with its potential to capture variation and learning over time, and the opportunity for developing trusting relationships with participants, offered the prospect of gaining some insight into complex processes that may be missed by studies that employ a single sampling point.

The lack of direct temporal comparability has assisted the focus on the shape and structure of the narratives of participants' stories, rather than being overly concerned to find common experiences at comparable points in the APP. Similarly, starting this research without the presuppositions that underlie, for instance, conventional phenomenographic work has allowed patterns to emerge that form valuable stories, rather than searching for pre-existing conceptions that other researchers (Haggis, 2003; Meyer & Eley, 2006) suggest need to be challenged.

Thematic analysis

The unit of analysis is individuals' perceptions of their academic probationary period. This study comprises perceptual data substantively concerning 'incorrigibles', which, as Gomm (2004) observes, are a general category of research interest which differ substantially from matters of fact verifiable by other means

(Gomm, 2004). Such experiences are amenable to meaningful analysis as Sayer (2000) argues, provided circumspection in drawing generalisations is exercised. It remains the case that researchers cannot easily stand outside their own position (Sayer, 2000), and for this reason:

> *All interpretations are provisional; they are made by positioned subjects who are prepared to know certain things and not others... analyses are always incomplete* (Rosaldo, quoted in Andrews, 2008: 86)

It is argued here that encouraging narrative accounts elicited a rich picture of the APP. Themes and concepts can be derived from literature, and data can be interrogated for the prevalence and strength of such themes and concepts. Attention is needed, however, to the *'emergent properties'* (Sayer, 2000) of accounts. Squire (2008) suggests that narratives *'are definitively human'* and clearly will vary according to those involved in any particular study. To bridge the narrative-theme divide, Polkinghorne (1995) makes a useful distinction drawing on Bruner's (1985) assertion of two types of cognition: paradigmatic and narrative reasoning where narrative:

> *...produces a series of anecdotal descriptions... [it] does not reduce itself to rules and generalities* (Polkinghorne, 1995: 11)

In contrast, paradigmatic reasoning is aimed at:

> *...identify[ing] particulars as instances of general notions or concepts... [and] seeks to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data* (Polkinghorne, 1995: 11).

This study follows the second of these approaches, an analysis of narratives, in order to explore and explain common themes and conceptualisations of the academic probationary period. In keeping with a critical realist framework, however, the analysis in the following chapters also bears in mind the notion of '*narrative*

reasoning', (Polkinghorne, 1995) and '*emergent properties'* (Sayer, 2000) whereby there is an acknowledgement that what emerges from data collection and analysis informs '*conceptual manifestations'* (Polkinghorne, 1995) where these are not adequately addressed in existing literature.This process of attending to data, and trying to see both its conceptual manifestations and emergent properties, is the subject of the following section of the chapter.

Analytic steps

Polkinghorne's (1995) distinction between narrative analysis (where outcomes of research are stories) and analysing narratives (where outcomes of research are thematic interrogations) usefully guided the process of analysis in this study. The idea of fictionalised 'stories' (Clough, 2002; Van Maanen, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1995) that sometimes conflate the words and deeds of actors in various studies (Clough, 2002) appears to conflict with my aim to represent the APP experiences of new lecturers that I committed to at the outset of this study.

To this end, therefore, analysis of interview transcripts has followed Polkinghorne's (1995) *'analysis of narratives'* characterised as a process whereby *'concepts are inductively derived'* (Polkinghorne, 1995: 13) from the data. In this respect, the analysis follows more closely his first position where he distinguishes between *'... the accuracy of the data and the plausability of the plot'* (Polkinghorne, 1995: 20) in narrative data. This accords with Riessman's declared process where, as she *'scrutinize[s] transcripts, features of the discourse often "jump out"'* (Riessman, 1993: 57).

With respect to this study, as Riessman suggests:

> *... considerable time [was spent] scrutinizing the rough drafts of transcriptions, often across a number of interviews... A focus for analysis often emerges or becomes clearer, as I see what respondents say.* (Riessman, 1993: 57)

Full transcriptions were available to me as detailed in the section on Sources (above), and considerable time was spent reading across the data. It was here that the pen portraits of *'field texts'* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) and the ways of telling (Squire, 2008) led to the first analytic step in a process often left implicit (Van Maanen, 1988). Emergent from the data were strong voices occupying distinctive positions. Some respondents in this study were clearly positive about their experiences of the APP. Others were less so, and the '*focus for analysis'* (Riessman, 1993) became clearer after this initial inductive categorisation into the three categories of resonance, dissonance and rejection that follow. This analytic step then enabled me to read through and across '*each category of way of life... for its place on the locus-of-control dimension'* (Polkinghorne, 1995: 14).

The '*locus-of-control'* (Polkinghorne, 1995) is fundamental to the analysis of the data that follows. Once this initial categorisation was made, the next step was to read within a category, coding data in relation to the stratified ontology of critical realism. The theoretical lens of critical realism (Archer, 1995; 2003, Sayer, 2000) insists that the layers of culture, structure and agency are analysed separately. By bearing this in mind, the interview transcripts could then be interrogated for instances relating to these three layers. Within-category coding was completed first, before turning to a consideration of across-category coding determined by the *'locus-of control'* (Polkinghorne, 1995) distinction.

Critical realism focuses on the large and contestable constructs of culture, structure and agency (Archer, 2003). As Riessman (1993) suggests, a secondary level of analysis was required in order to contextualise these phenemona for a study of the academic probationary process. Therefore, sub-themes were developed where necessary to illustrate nuances in the actual data in relation to the '*sensitising concepts'* (Blumer, 1954, in Robson, 2002) derived from data, other literature and the critical realist framework (Archer, 2003; Sayer, 2000). Rather than a neat picture (McArthur, 2010), the messiness of boundary drawing is immediately apparent as, for instance, the sub-theme of mentoring can be seen to be a factor of both structure and agency. Similarly, probation and other policies pertaining to academic staff can reside in cultural or structural domains. The refined coding scheme is included as Appendix 3. In Appendix 4, I have included a brief,

anonymous excerpt from one interview transcript, in order to show the application of the coding scheme to the data. It should be noted that all coding was done by hand; Appendix 4 is, therefore, a representation of the process.

Before turning to the data that forms the basis for this study I turn next to an evaluation of my approach that considers the nature of data at my disposal and a reflection on the contingency of any qualitative research study.

An evaluation of method

Studies that are primarily reliant on interview data, and especially those based on opportunistic samples, always suffer from weaknesses in relation to bias, lack of generalisability and questions concerning the validity of interpretation. Given the variables involved in the target population (HESA, 2011) and the socially constructed nature of interviews, forms of replication can also provide challenges to the conduct of qualitative studies. Given that:

> *The knowledgeability of human actors is always bounded on the one hand by the unconscious and on the other by unacknowledged conditions/unintended consequences of action* (Giddens, 1984: 282).

it is reasonable to consider the contingency associated with qualitative studies. As the critical realist framework suggests:

> *In virtue of the remarkable sensitivity of people to their contexts – which derives particularly from our ability to interpret situations rather than merely being passively shaped by them – social phenomena rarely have the durability of many of the objects studied by natural science* (Sayer, 2000: 13)

Thus, interviews, with all their faults, are a site of co-constructing knowledge of social phenomena and hence researchers need to be cognisant of the limitations that accompany such '*provisional stabilities'* (Saunders, 2006). As a setting for the potential exercise of power, ethical conduct needs to be continuously and

reflectively considered. Similarly, an awareness that adopting particular approaches in interviewing – in this case, a more narrative approach – may also privilege particular communication styles. Therefore, due attention needs to be paid to the various points of view that '*narrativization'* (Riessman, 1993) affords, my own, and that of the narrator.

Riessman (1993) also notes the different tellings of a narrative, according to audience, whilst stressing that various versions of telling an experience should not be read as deceptive. Jones (2010) uses this idea in a similar fashion, showing how an academic career can be carefully reconstructed, not as a lie but as a rhetorical act. *'Social discourses'* suggests Riessman (1993: 65) *'do not remain constant over time'*, an issue that points towards needing some sensitivity on behalf of the analyst in recognising that data is rooted in a particular moment, as is the researcher's understanding of such data.

The exercise of undue influence and the potential for bias by interviewer/analyst cannot escape from such difficulties. Recognising and engaging with these issues and appealing to Sayer's (1992) notion of *'practically adequate'* research can, perhaps, ensure that the outcomes of such research are not claimed as 'truth' when what is presented is far more contingent. Transcripts do not, and cannot, faithfully represent the embodied experience of interviewing and especially in cases where the object of study is in the domain of incorrigibles to which Gomm (2004) refers. Triangulation of interview data by consulting further sources (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000) is often a useful approach to overcoming such shortcomings, and held to be an additional safeguard in qualitative studies that can strengthen analysis. This was not an approach taken in this study, for reasons related to the potential difficulties in insider-outsider work noted above, but would be a way to strengthen the findings of the work. Evidence would be readily available to undertake such triangulation – the examination of policies, initial professional development frameworks, work submitted for assessment, the views of knowledgeable others such as mentors or educational developers (Crawford, 2010) – but pursuing such an approach could undermine relationships built over time with participants.

Sayer's (2000) *'double hermeneutic'* also plays a role, in that this work cannot easily be characterised as 'insider' or 'outsider' research (Robson, 2002). Each of these positions has its strengths and weaknesses. Awareness of the '*sensitising concepts'* (Blumer, 1954 in Robson, 2002) that shape experience for other probationary academics can be a useful interpretative position to adopt. In contrast, however, it can be argued that my role as a probationary academic when I began this work could unduly influence how I read the data available. I hope that drawing attention to researcher reflexivity in my methodological explanations above, show that I have at least acknowledged and considered how my role may have influenced this work.

Riessman (1993) suggests that four criteria can be applied to work of this nature. As Polkinghorne (1995) contrasts accuracy with plausability, Riessman juxtaposes persuasiveness and plausability. She suggests that literary practices and an understanding of reader response are foundational for making a persuasive argument. Van Maanen (1988) also suggests literary craft as a determining feature of qualitative (ethnographic) studies. I would prefer to appeal to Riessman's (1993: 67) criteria of coherence, where thick description engages the reader, and pragmatism, which she suggests is '*future oriented'*, suggesting that my findings are both explanatory and actionable.

As alluded to previously, the findings in this thesis are not, and should not be, expected to stand for the variety of experiences that constitute the APP. They sample what a small proportion of new lecturers undergoing this process are experiencing, in a variety of venues, and in relation of course, to their biographies, expectations and, often, formal curricula. This may seem such a limiting constraint as to suggest that we can learn nothing from such situated experiences. On the contrary, it is just such situational learning that can provide insight into the multitude of complex interactions that are involved in the APP.

Findings are contingent on the experiences of the individuals in a necessarily limited study. There is a danger in extrapolating from here to generalised good practice. I would appeal again to the ideas of persuasiveness (Riessman, 1993) and utility (Gomm, 2004). It is my hope that what follows persuades, or at least, suggests, that we could look again at the processes and activities that constitute induction,

probation and PGCerts. It is also my hope that no reader assumes a definitive position, a closure, on a complex topic. Whilst limitations can be enumerated, imagination should not be so closed to potential future directions.

Summary

It has been my aim in this chapter to justify the approach I have taken to this work. My assumption has been that, whilst much work takes place with my target audience of new academics, little of it especially concerns itself with the APP. Equally, I am keen to avoid the charge of suggesting a totalising discourse surrounding such experiences. Implicit here, then, is a desire to gather stories, to allow a reflection on practice that is not necessarily evident in our current research base. A key motivation here was a desire to 'flatten' the power structures of higher educational research, and to move away from work with an evaluative component (Cresswell, 2007).

The way to access such stories would be simply to encourage people to talk – to '*narrativize'* (Riessman, 1993) their experiences through having an idea of broad areas for discussion to be negotiated through a '*conversational'* encounter (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). One difficulty in adopting this approach is that I '*sanction'* (Macfarlane, 2009) whatever narratives are told, with little concern for my own values. Thus, in interview, I can be found empathising with a range of positions, not all necessarily to my liking. But it helped participants to open up and tell their stories. This data comes to the fore in the chapters that follow.

I hope my assumptions, and my procedures, are explicit. It is these methodological aspects that will colour a reader's view of what follows, and whether it is a useful account of the academic probationary period. It is to the substantive issue of the research findings that I turn in the chapters that follow, detailing distinctive stances and many of their confounding nuances that go towards the profound ontological journey of becoming academic in contemporary UK HE.

Chapter 4: Resonance

> *I mean, it's a difficult one to do because I'm very junior and this proposal, even though everybody in (faculty) was invited to put in a strategic proposal and lots did, but mine is one of the ones that they think is actually useful. So it's gone up to the university senate.*

This is the first of three findings chapters that follow the same format. Each interrogates the narratives thematically in relation to a particular 'stance' that emerged as participants articulated their views on their APP. The structure of each of the findings chapters is guided by the theoretical and analytic models presented in Chapters 2 and 3, engaging in turn with factors related to cultures, structures and agency. Themes within cultural factors, for example, include experiences of departmental culture and the role of networks and communities. Within structures, IPD and other formal requirements – teaching, research, and administration – are discussed.

The nature of agency, as voiced by probationary lecturers, is the primary distinguishing feature of each of the stances towards probation, and this is the device that was used to categorise and report the findings as noted in Chapter 3. Agentic discourse, in this context, is taken to mean interview talk that is driven by feelings, particularly those of personal effectiveness. It also includes perceptions of relationships with professionally significant others and, where volunteered, issues of work-life balance.

This chapter (as with the following two) begins with a brief discussion of the proportion and characteristics of the sample included in this category. This is followed by an examination of what emerged from the data in relation to the three layers of culture, structure and agency which draws heavily on extracts from the interview data. Quotations are not attributed, in keeping with the undertakings given regarding confidentiality. Where it is necessary to draw a distinction, reference is made to a broad discipline area.

As in earlier chapters, two common generic terms are used. First, reference is made to PGCerts and this is taken to mean any formal IPD offered to probationers, such as a qualification in teaching and learning or academic practice. Second, the institutional home of this formal provision is referred to as the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC), but this does not denote the actual name of the organisational unit responsible.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the resonant stance towards academic probation, before a final summary synthesises findings that are taken up again in Chapter 7.

Characteristics and proportion of the sample

Ten of the 23 probationary lecturers who took part in this study are categorised in the resonance stance. This group comprises five women and five men, eight of whom worked in pre-1992 institutions and two in post-1992s. Two are from overseas. Six of these new academics had had at least some experience in job roles outside of the university environment, and one had entered academic life after 10 years in another profession. Six had held other academic roles (such as post-doctoral or research fellow positions) before taking up their first lectureships. Four participants in the resonance category, therefore, had studied and then gone on to work directly within higher education, including the two international academics.

All of these participants were full-time in their first academic post, six within social science disciplines and four in science and engineering departments. All were interviewed either twice or three times across a year of their probation, between October 2006 and November 2008 resulting in 28 interviews and 27 transcripts (the recording having failed in one encounter). The eight academics in pre-1992 universities were all subject to a three-year probationary period; of the remaining two, one had a one-year and one had two-year probation. All of these academics remain in post at the time of writing (February 2011).

The cultural dimension: resonance

This first layer of analysis deals with the participants' perceptions of institutional, departmental or disciplinary cultures. It is acknowledged that it may be difficult to elicit from very new academics any coherent account of academic life as their access to this information is limited. What follows in this section of the chapter is an attempt to ascertain the sense-making processes of probationary lecturers as they adjust to their new roles. In turn, this first part of the chapter tries to separate out views of institutional and departmental cultures, and includes an analysis of the perceived role of networks and communities in establishing an academic career.

Views of institutional culture

As can be seen from the quote that opens this chapter, there is recognition of university hierarchy, and the new academic's position within it. This view suggests an acknowledgement that each probationer is an insignificant cog within the organisation, but one where there is potential to excel and make an impact. The institution, however, is often characterised as a faceless bureaucracy (Watson, 2009), and sometimes one with bad habits:

> *I guess I'm just naive in that I thought that big institutions, especially academic ones, were supposed to be full of bright people, it should function well... And it just isn't at all.*

Responses to institutional decrees, Davies and Petersen (2005) suggest, are becoming more conformist due to increased management surveillance. The new academics in this section of the sample, however, display rather more subversiveness in the face of what they perceive to be dysfunctional management demands:

> *...but they get a bit upset about their workload model here... My suggestion was we just leave the spreadsheets well alone and do what we want to do anyway which is probably what will happen in the end.*

This kind of response suggests that rather than the dominant culture of the institution reproducing itself, even very new academics can adopt a more autonomous role for themselves. There is a feeling here that participants in the resonance category are attuned to institutional cultures, may be somewhat dismissive of their effectiveness, and choose to operate in a more individual fashion.

As more universities make increasing claims to excellence (Watson, 2010), some new academics notice institutional practices that will limit progress towards such goals:

> *I think there seems to be a 9-5 culture in this university... and encouraged by the university I think, in the fact that the building actually gets physically locked at certain times and you can't go anywhere. And to me it's actually against the whole excellence agenda of people actually being able to work on their research if they want.*

The distinction between institutional goals and institutional practices, often related to talk of change, especially restructuring, raises suspicions with regard to senior management agendas:

> *And you wonder, again speaking to other people, who's actually driving the [VC]? Is he being driven by somebody else? I don't know these sorts of questions... why he's got to cut back the number of schools that he wants... But it was funny to hear all the political dealings and people not putting their heads above the parapet. But nobody would stand up and get their head shot off.*

The collegial model of governance that McNay (1995) details seems to be absent in the accounts of the new academics interviewed for this study. Several participants highlighted the notion of '*poor communication*' of strategic priorities and drivers for change. Whilst the lack of communication – or possibly, a limited interest in the 'politics' of change – results in some level of reported uncertainty surrounding the

impact of forthcoming change (Trowler, 1998), those in the resonance category express their determination to continue to pursue their own agendas:

> *I don't think you can define very accurately what an academic is or what an academic does but I think there are huge opportunities to make it what you want it to be...*
>
> *...ultimately I might even have to redirect my research effort to some extent, to comply with university strategies and things. Although I think my research area will be quite compatible with what they're after.*

In this group of new academics, there appears to be a strong determination to position themselves to pursue an individualistic perspective to an extent (Clegg, 2008). The wider politics and strategies of the institution, whilst present in their interview talk, does not dominate in the fashion that Davies and Petersen (2005) report. If the experiences of the various institutional cultures of these participants are perhaps, minor irritations, the context of their employing departments plays a more significant role. This aspect is the focus of the next section, before looking outside of the department, to networks and communities.

Experiences of departmental cultures

It is tempting to conflate an academic department with a disciplinary culture, as Becher and Trowler (2001) appear to do when they focus on practices specific to particular disciplines. As institutions play out inter- and multi-disciplinary research imperatives, however, it is not always the case that probationary lecturers join departments with a familiar ethos:

> *The boundaries around the teaching and research groups, I have come to understand. They are pretty tight boundaries and no-one seems to cross them particularly well and so, in a way, I felt as though I'm a bit, um... yeah, I do cross the boundaries quite a lot*

more that what I would think other staff members do. So, having got to know them actually from outside [the home research group] has been quite nice as well.

There's myself and [a colleague] who are both doing [specialism] based work. It's... we were just talking the other day about someone looking for work and saying just one more person makes a group, basically you need three, you're starting to be known for doing [this kind of work].

Comments such as these point to some of the initial challenges probationary lecturers face as they contemplate how they will fit in to their new departments and make a contribution. The extracts immediately above come from social science and science; they highlight that the idea of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) may not be immediately available to new appointments and that any form of shared enterprise is unlikely to be found within departments pursuing a broadening of their teaching and research agendas.

What is clear to probationers is that they need to pursue collaborations outwith their employing departments. This can be seen as a challenge in boundary-crossing, in the spirit of Gouldner's 'cosmopolitans' (1957), and for some it can be unsettling initially to feel differentiated from immediate colleagues:

The thing that's good about that is because it says to me when you see so much variation as actually goes on even within a pretty tight-knit group... that also helped me to realise that it's OK that I, that I'm not doing it wrong... seeing that there's that variation made me feel like it's OK if I'm another variable, that's all right.

Those in the resonance stance universally declared that they had joined friendly departments, even if the research and teaching areas, approaches and traditions of a department were not necessarily familiar. If teaching and research interests were not well connected with the established groups within their employing schools or departments, there was a feeling of collegiality. For some, the bureaucratic

structures of institutions and departments, and weak communication links, gave rise to personal and professional insecurities:

> *The culture here is very different. There are a few things specific to [the school] which makes it very difficult, particularly for a new staff member, particularly if they're from abroad, to get to know others and to start to try and fit in with the working of the school.*

It is not only international academics in this category whose initial impressions are that their employing departments do not necessarily provide a sense of belonging or the requisite intellectual resources for them to grow into the role:

> *The future is in multi-disciplinary stuff and it's the point whereby I've got far better interactions and research things going with people at [another institution] than I have with people inside.*

Underlying this point is a familiarity with the policies that guide research directions in UK universities, and their potential shortfalls:

> *Now I can be a PI and [name] could be a PI and co-PI status is fine because it's from different universities. The two people that are inside here cannot be co-PIs with me from the point of view of how it's viewed from a research exercise or anything like that...*

Whilst these rules and divisions are an irritation – and for international staff probably not fully understood yet – the pressure to collaborate both internally and externally is clear. The confidence to do so, however, appears to lie in the existence of a supportive culture within the employing department. This enables new academics to attempt to bid and collaborate externally without fear of criticism:

> *There's a lot of university processes that once you know about them you can't ignore them... you can get away with that once and if you push your luck probably twice, but no more than that. So that, in some way, I just think wouldn't it be nice if I didn't know I had to fill in*

this form because I could just go do it, but luckily [my HoD] is pretty pragmatic... I think a lot then depends on line managers or bosses or whatever whether they're going to back you up on that and luckily mine does.

The positive comments about friendly departments and supportive heads of department appears to be a crucial feature for new lecturers:

The member of staff I took over from has been fantastic in that way in terms of like 'teach this, here's some notes on it, and here's some examples all ready that you can use' and stuff like that.

This might illustrate a weakness in Gouldner's (1957) notion of 'locals' and 'cosmopolitans' in that pursuing one of these paths – being committed to an institution or committed to a discipline – is not always necessarily an individual choice. It is a relational choice (Archer, 1995) because of the constraints on social action, meaning that choices may be limited as much by others as by individuals' imaginations.

Departments do not always function as welcoming communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), in that they may, as an institutional strategic priority, prioritise the development of new areas, rather than consolidating existing strengths. Probationers recognise the need for these forms of support outside of their immediate environment. As junior colleagues, however, this can be seen as quite a challenging, but potentially satisfying, marker of their development. In the following section of this chapter, how probationers perceive this particular demand is explored.

The role of networks and communities

All of the probationary lecturers in the resonance category had moved to a new institution to take up their lectureship; for all bar two this had meant a move to a new area of the country, one had arrived directly from abroad, and a further two were returning to the UK after post-doctoral research elsewhere. Experience abroad can

extend professional networks, but this high level of mobility suggests that those taking up their first posts are likely to do so under conditions where their support networks are limited. Employing institutions do not necessarily pay much attention to this aspect of adjustment. An international social scientist commented on how difficult building new relationships can be:

> *We have staff... across 13 different buildings. So just simply that makes it difficult to know the other people in the school... so we're all mixed up and there's no staff room or common room or anything like that.*

By her final interview, at the end of her first year of probation, this aspect is still proving difficult:

> *I went along to the MSc induction which was really good. I think because we had, which I've spoken about before, such a lack of social cohesion between the staff here, it's always nice to go along to any kind of social event [laughs].*

This reflects not just the need for a social dimension in her new role abroad (Green and Myatt, 2011). She appreciates the need to collaborate for her research, and indeed a research grant she was pursuing demanded a formal mentor:

> *You've got to put in a special case if you want it to be someone from outside [the employing institution] he's at [university] now but he's been here as well... But his relationship with the school here is not particularly positive. There's a bit of bad blood with, between him and some other senior colleagues. And I just was really cautious of how it might affect things.*

Her story of '*starting right at the bottom'* in a new country where she knows no-one has clearly now been complicated further by the emergence of some academic politics. Collaboration on the strength of research interests is not straightforward, especially where it might damage local relationships. These difficulties are not only

the preserve of those who have come from abroad. The difficulty of finding out what goes on elsewhere within institutions or local areas can cause frustration:

> *The biggest weakness is lack of communication. Me being here 18 months and discovering a month or two ago that people are doing stuff that's completely hugely relevant to what might be going on, but you just don't know. No-one ever has this information.*

Where new staff are appointed deliberately to broaden the reach of a department, as noted above, the local community, even where it wants to, is unable to provide the right support:

> *It's not that I'm not getting support. I'm getting people to look at my grant apps and give me decent feedback, but because they don't know the field, that makes it very difficult. So it's kind of like, I think I'll keep going on until I actually get one [research grant] and then I've got to learn from getting one what to write in the next one.*

As with the international social scientist, this engineer still turns to his PhD supervisor, although he recognises the competitive nature of research funding:

> *It is still a conflict of interest for him. Strictly any money that might be out, his department will be competing for the pot with me. I know he wouldn't do anything to deliberately stitch me, but it seems a little bit unfair asking him to help me get money as well as the other young academics he's got.*

In his second interview, it transpired that a professorial appointment had been made to strengthen his research area:

> *But he doesn't seem particularly interested in collaborative stuff. And he doesn't seem a hugely helpful person generally.*

Institutions and funding councils promote interdisciplinary and collaborative research as productive avenues for the future. Less is done, however, to support probationary lecturers in their efforts to establish networks and communities within which to work. For others in the resonant category, the ideas of networking and collaboration are absent, perhaps reflecting less of a tradition in the social sciences of research teams. For two scientists, however, the focus is on building a team internally, from the ground up:

> *I've got a PhD student arriving in December or January. I have a final year Master's student and an exchange guy, they're both here for six months. And their advantage is that they're free and I don't need to submit proposals to acquire them... as a new start you get priority for such things.*
>
> *Obviously the buck stops with me now so it's important that I improve as a supervisor compared to how I was when I was a postdoc... groups of 10-12 the PI can run it themselves quite well. It will be a while before I have a group of 10-12 so I'm not too worried yet.*

For these probationers, their ambitions were to build and run their own labs, accepting that as their careers developed, their role would be to manage research groups rather than conduct research themselves. The more limited desire for networking and community building amongst the social scientists seems to be aimed at 'fitting in':

> *It is almost more like joining a community and trying to actually fit into that. Although the HoD has a final say in things, quite a lot of things are decided by the department as a collective, as a community. And you do feel when you come to the department at first that it's almost like an establishment of friends and you're trying to actually almost elbow your way in to a certain extent.*

Differing ideas around the role of networks and communities supports Becher and Trowler's (2001) arguments regarding the nature of disciplines. It also highlights that

long-established working practices remain unchanged, and play a key role as new generations of probationary lecturers are inducted into academic life.

The structural dimension: institutional requirements

Where cultural factors are concerned with wider environments, structural demands refer to those policies and practices decided within an institution as constituting effective job performance. These are the 'rules' of the '*academic game'* (Perkins, 2006) that must be satisfied for probationary lecturers are to be confirmed in post. To satisfy probationary requirements presupposes an understanding of those requirements by new academics. In this section of the chapter, institutional requirements in the areas of IPD, teaching, research and administration are explored. To reach an institutionally-imposed 'standard' for probation it is useful to interrogate perceptions of that process, so I begin with participants' views of what their probationary status means to them.

Probation

The 10 participants constituting the resonance category had varying probationary periods. The lengthier, three-year process that is common practice in pre-1992 institutions plays a more significant role in interview talk than that for the new lecturers in the post-1992 universities:

> *That's what I'm concentrating on at the moment, we have a, it's basically an ongoing review of your career type review...*

This is the only reference that this participant makes to any kind of probationary process in three interviews across a year. It seems, therefore, that in a post-1992 institution, probation is not experienced as an onerous demand. The other post-1992 representative has more to say, because she has connected probation with IPD and concessions that are made (this aspect is also explored further in the following section):

I don't see the point in having to attend a course if there's no requirement on you to pass it and yet at the same time not provide you with the time to be able to pass it either. It just seems like a pointless exercise.

The requirement of participating in a PGCert gives rise to issues of timing in the probationary period, which can lead to perverse incentives:

So it was very difficult and most of my teaching happened in the second semester when I could have had something to write about, but of course the deadline was before that, so it doesn't really seem to make sense... I've also heard things like somebody deferred taking part in the course twice in a row which meant by the time they should take part they had the two years required teaching so they didn't in the end have to do it.

Probationary requirements can thus become yet another 'game' to be played. In addition, formal mentors are often appointed for probationary academics. These are usually departmentally-based, to supplement general provision. For the probationer, this is not always a success:

And to be honest he's not the person that I would feel comfortable asking for help with certain things anyway...

The actual terms of employment contracts also features as a concern in satisfying probationary requirements:

When I re-looked at it, I think the contract says I could do up to two evenings a week. Which in principle, if I didn't have a family, I really wouldn't mind doing because then I'd just take the time off in the day.

This raises uncertainty about how a probationer will be judged, an issue that is especially important when trying to fit in to a new department. This feeling of uncertainty presented a challenge for all of the probationary academics who took

part in this study. Those in the resonance stance dealt with it more pragmatically than others, by reading other institutional signals. When asked if she'd now passed her one-year probation, this social scientist was phlegmatic:

> *I have no idea, I'm only assuming it because I've got a workload for next year... So I know I've got at least another three months, and given that I have teaching loads for the whole of next year... and I was thinking that the other day, whether I need to have something or whether it's automatic?*

Appraisal also attracts criticism regarding timing:

> *We have an appraisal but it's not, which I think is really strange, it doesn't really assess performance. I don't really know what it does. I had mine ages ago, which wasn't a very good time to have it... so I'd been here like three and a bit months and obviously I had nothing to say... Presumably this year it will be more, it will be better because I might have things I want to raise...*

The narrative of this post-1992 social scientist has been dwelt on in order that the process of probation can be examined. This new academic can be seen to be operating under conditions of uncertainty, with little real clarity of expectations; formal professional development must be engaged with (but not necessarily passed, and clearly can be avoided). Formal mentoring is provided, but is not always successful. Terms of contract need to be re-visited in order to determine what exactly is required. Appraisal systems are not understood especially well, and what constitutes successful performance is so unclear that only the subtle institutional signals of assigning a continuing workload send a positive message about future employment. Her story was not unusual across the entire sample. However, by the final interview with this participant, approval has been forthcoming:

> *Yeah. I got my letter saying I've passed [probation], which makes a mockery of the whole... I haven't passed the course. It was a*

requirement to do it. But then, it was a requirement to do it but not to pass.

She does not dwell on this confirmation of status, unlike a pre-1992 participant serving a three-year probation for whom the institutional and academic legitimation conferred by passing probation is a significant goal:

Being on probation is a terrible thing because you're always thinking if I do something wrong, poof, out [snaps fingers], people get the boot and being on probation just makes me feel insecure to an extent.

Coming to the end of his second year, clearly he has been living with this insecurity for quite some time. He feels his department is supportive:

I know that within [the department] I have been accepted... but outside, in the wider university I still feel like I'm on probation so to be accepted by the university is something I still need.

Probing further about this strength of feeling, he related the significance of passing probation to a previous work history as a contract researcher:

You're quite right, I might just get to that point next year and go, that was a real non-event but I suppose I'm hoping, I don't know, OK, every time I try and think about it the only thing that pops up in my head is security, security, security, so that's pretty much all I see in it but even that is a validation of sorts, that's what I'm looking for.

This contrasts with another participant who also had a history of contract research:

Maybe that's a few years of being in universities, the probation period I think, I don't know, they're either going to keep me or they're going to get rid of me, I think that comes from my background of doing research where you've got no stability at all... I think if they weren't happy with me somebody would speak to me during the time... so I

don't really think I'm too worried about the probation thing, that's what I say, I'll either be kicked out at the end of 3 years or I'll be told to pull my socks up.

For others in the resonance category, however, there is far less reference to their probationary status, with most of it referring to institutional requirements:

I suspect you wouldn't just get chucked out at the end of the three years for not passing it [the PGCert] but I suspect they'd put pressure on you to.

I think, as far as I know the only thing which is a specifically defined target in my probationary period is completion of the [PGCert]. Numerical targets, it's a number of papers I think, but that's not difficult to make, even when you're not really doing that much research. I just write reviews.

There is a clear understanding that, for many, engaging with (and sometimes passing) their PGCert is a requirement for passing probation. There is also recognition that they must be seen to engage in other academic activities such as bidding for research funding and publishing, but this is less clearly quantified. There is also occasional mention of the benefits of being on probation:

I get protected from too much teaching, I also get protected from too much admin.

Reduction in teaching load is the most commonly mentioned policy in relation to probation, but whereas the participant above noted administrative responsibilities were also minimised, this appears to be less common:

The person who's been giving me advice about this has been saying, certainly in terms of your admin, you're now at the stage when you should be saying no if people throw more at you... something that's

going on in the back of my mind, having a slight defence, you know, what am I going to be dumped with here?

The 'fitting in' aspect encourages probationers to volunteer for tasks but by the end of the interview process it was clear that some had regrets over this strategy:

I don't want to exaggerate that but yeah, certainly more guarded. No longer 'yes, can do' really. 'Yes could do but...' would probably be more like it now.

There is a ridiculous amount of admin to the point where I don't understand where it comes from... I'm not used to doing so much admin and I think maybe some of it shouldn't be my role, but whether that's specific to this institution [a post-1992]

One probationer, in a pre-1992, seems to have been well-prepared to 'dodge' the difficult administrative tasks:

Making sure you understand all the bureaucracy and all the rules and don't get nailed with, I didn't have this problem, but others do, making sure you don't get lumbered with too many admin tasks. One of the new lecturers in [school] had been here about a year and got lumbered with first year Director of Studies. That's as brutal as it gets. Only because she said she'd do it, which was insane. No-one understands why she said she would. They tried to get her to do it, but no-one would have seriously pushed her into doing it, but she said she'd do it.

This story suggests that not all new academics necessarily understand what is involved in accepting certain administrative roles, and the potential implications for their probationary performance. It is also indicative of a failing on the part of institutions to consider probation holistically and give each probationer the best opportunities to achieve those elements that do constitute their expressed probationary requirements.

Research, publishing and administration have all been recognised by new academics as playing their part in satisfying probation. But it is participating in and/or completing a PGCert that is expressed as the only formal demand placed upon them to pass probation. It is this aspect of the probationary experience that is explored in the following section.

Initial professional development

Given the apparent centrality of the PGCert to satisfactory completion of probation, it is important to capture new lecturers' perceptions of the role the courses play in the APP. To this end, two stories – from social scientists, one in a pre-1992 and one in a post-1992 institution – open this section of the chapter. First, the probationer in the pre-1992 university:

> *They did give me the option to leave it [the PGCert] for a year um, but I kind of thought if I leave it for a year what's the point in doing it at all because I will already have muddled through the first year so if I'm going to learn how to improve my teaching then that's something that I need to do straight away before I get into any kind of bad habits that I then can't be bothered to change so I'm doing it now.*

This interviewee was keen to participate in the PGCert early in her probationary period, in order to appreciate the complexities of a new role. Teaching is considered important, and learning how to be effective is an opportunity to be grasped. By the second interview, there seems less excitement, and issues of congruence appear:

> *things are fine, I'm teaching a little bit more than I was last semester but nothing particularly dramatic, um, and I suppose [the PGCert] has now really kicked in for better or for worse... Yes, you know I was quite happy to do my plan and do my things and I have done quite well on it but don't agree with any of the comments that were made but pass, hoop, jump through [laughs].*

Contextualising the qualification is requiring a good deal of effort on the part of the participant, who finds a lack of flexibility as progress is made through the PGCert:

> *because some of the generic stuff I thought, well I get that but I don't see how this works in [discipline] and I really want to move that one step further and on the PGCert they keep talking about, if you get your head around the generic stuff and then can move on to the subject-specific that's really great, and I actually find it easier the other way round, to look at the subject-specific stuff first.*

Early enthusiasm seems to give way to a degree of frustration, exacerbated by the difficulties of decoding feedback. Confidence in teaching would thus appear to be developing from the doing of it (Sadler, 2008), rather than the learning about it.

The probationer from the post-1992 institution also alludes to frustration and difficulties with feedback across her three interviews:

> *It's mandatory [the PGCert] in that if you don't have two years' teaching experience you're expected to participate, but I don't think you're expected to pass. Which is probably just as well because I've been asked to resubmit my first piece of coursework because it didn't meet standards which I don't think is going to happen actually because I don't have time to resubmit it. It's crazy. They ask you to do this course and submit masters level coursework without actually timetabling it anywhere in your schedule.*

The frustration of not being allocated sufficient time to complete the course successfully is compounded by her experience of the course itself:

> *And the course itself I didn't find particularly helpful either... I think whoever decided it is necessary for new staff, they've just not built the right course and everybody's been more or less complaining about it.*

Her concerns are centred on the theoretical nature of the course, and the lack of anything practical, the assessment regime and associated deadlines, and how the course expectations were introduced:

> *For example, one of the assignments was describe a critical incident and how you dealt with it. At that point I had only done four hours teaching.*
>
> *And actually the course leader made it very clear that she felt that you could either be very good at teaching or very good at research and I think that was really wrong to say... I find it quite offensive that what she's saying to me is if I'm good at research I can't be good at teaching. That's effectively what she's saying and actually I do want to be good at teaching.*

The final interview with this participant was conducted after she had been confirmed in post and she reflected again on the course, its assessment and feedback practices:

> *I didn't pass the work. Most of us failed. Because the person doing the marking decided that we didn't use the literature she was expecting us to use, and so didn't like [it]... No. I don't have to re-do it. But I don't.... if I've missed the point of the exercise, then I want to know... And then I thought well if I haven't got the point after attending class and everything, I'm not really sure if I'm going to get the point. Because I'm not a stupid person, I have tried to engage. And the exercises were very much supposed to be reflective, which is so ironic. How can you get that wrong? How you can reflect incorrectly?*

She refers to the possibility of re-doing the failed coursework:

I plan to at some point but it's still on a list and I think I would have been more inclined to have made a stab at it if her comments and she even gave us workshops on feedback, talking about how to write good feedback and stuff. And I'm just like reading it, thinking I wouldn't dream of writing that on my student's piece of work. It was just incredibly harsh.

These two narratives have been detailed extensively as they give insight into how probationers may experience their PGCerts. Some issues are surfaced that are not commonly caught by conventional evaluation studies. These stories give a rich description of what may go wrong on PGCerts. In particular, for these probationers, their early enthusiasm for learning about teaching well appears to have been damaged; this may have implications for further engagement in IPD.

For others in the resonance category, participation in the PGCert has not been quite so unsettling. Virtually all of the respondents in this category see the benefits of acquiring a teaching qualification but sometimes question the relevance of some of what is taught:

It's a useful thing, although I do tend to find a lot of the stuff we do would be almost impossible to implement in a science and engineering sense... I said to her I understand what you're trying to do because I understand this is quite boring for them. I'll do my best to make it more interesting but some things just aren't going to work... looking at novel methods of assessment... again a good concept except that, with a lot of things, I just think they find it difficult enough to do the assessments, to try and mark somebody else's, I'm not sure how that will work.

The tension between novel forms of assessment – stressed in class and in an institutional drive to cut formal assessment – and the requirements of professional bodies in science and engineering was also noted. Another strand focused on in many PGCerts is e-learning. The relevance of certain e-learning tools and techniques also, like assessment issues, tended to draw fire:

This is a bonkers module actually. Second Life, Facebook, MySpace, that kind of stuff, even the teaching one [institutional VLE]. I put forward the argument that I thought that was actually very exclusive because a lot of people do not want to use MySpace and Facebook... It's just being used because it's new and cool, not because it necessarily conveys an advantage.

I just really struggled with the last module that we did which I thought was a complete waste of time... it was on e-learning and it was just badly taught, it could have been a very good module but I have now finished all the sessions on that module but I'm still none the wiser as to what e-learning packages etc are actually available at the university or how really to use them...

One probationer did find something useful in the e-learning module of her PGCert:

It was really plugged at the start, using audio, basically podcasting and I really liked the idea of it and it was good from my point of view, sort of playing it back and thinking, 'how did I do?' How did I rate my own performance? Which was never particularly high but I thought the students will benefit from it anyway.

Being able to listen again to lecture performances allowed this probationer to reflect very specifically on the structure and content of her lectures, beyond their use as a revision aid for students. The implications of this though, are unwelcome:

One of the lectures was far better than the other one... I'm not really sure what to do with it, I think it might be the content... I think level 1's just maybe not the right place for it but then that has got implications for a distance learning programme... If I re-did the lecture for that then I'd have to re-do my distance learning stuff, which I absolutely hated doing and would like to avoid at all costs.

The dislike stemmed from a lack of technical support, meaning academics had to video and edit their lectures themselves, which was felt to be a time-consuming and uneconomic model for producing distance learning materials. However, those with an actual need to use e-learning tools appreciate this aspect of a PGCert more than those for whom this style of teaching is only currently a possibility.

If assessment and e-learning can prove to be difficult elements to get right on a PGCert, for many new academics in the resonant category, one feature stood out as a particular strength:

> *One of the things we certainly see in the PGCert classes is that the thing people seem to appreciate the most beyond the thing they're learning is the opportunity to communicate and certainly in a different environment, different situation... a very good opportunity to discuss how they're feeling and if people are in departments where they don't have that sort of mechanism that has got to be rough... particularly when you're new and you've got all these questions, well who answers them, so having something like this must be fantastic for people in that situation.*

PGCerts are often criticised for being generic and irrelevant. For two international academics especially, the social role that they play has been helpful and supportive. UK staff, with greater experience of the British higher education system were, however, somewhat more ambivalent:

> *It's an excellent course but there were some days, well quite a lot of days I think, what they tell you in a day long workshop could have been information that you got in two hours and then you're away... But I think, as a general principle, the idea of reflective practice and all the rest of it, all very good. And it does make you think oh how am I fitting this into my lecture... But at least we do get to be students again... We get our staff cards stamped with a NUS symbol so it's quite amusing.*

These comments point to how seriously some probationers take participation in their teaching qualification. Whilst some clearly engaged enthusiastically, at least at the start of their courses, one in particular seemed to dismiss any potential usefulness in this form of IPD:

> *I just didn't have time to do it and to be honest it became a pain in the backside, I'm sorry to say that, but because it's dragging away from time that I wanted to write lectures, it's really, I don't know, that's been a bit of an issue with me. I must admit I've been a bit lax because no-one tells you what to do so that's one thing I do need to get my finger out because everyone keeps telling me that [the core module] takes so long to do and I know if it's not done they'll extend your probation but even in my head I'm not really that bothered about it, if they're going to throw me out the door because of that then maybe I don't want to be here.*

For those displaying a resonant stance towards their probationary period, this is the only overtly negative comment regarding participation in a PGCert. The other nine respondents, as demonstrated above, did show a willingness to engage and an openness to the concept of becoming qualified in teaching.

Formal mentoring

A second form of IPD offered during probation is mentoring. Whilst in theory this seems to be a universal system, in practice it functions, and can be experienced, in widely varying ways, depending on the individuals and processes involved. One probationer made no reference to any form of formal mentoring (although she worked in an institution that did make this provision). A further four of these new academics made very limited reference to any kind of consultation with a mentor. For some, though, the experience is wholly positive:

> *My mentor is not talking about passing my probation, my mentor is talking about me pencilling in when I should be looking for becoming a senior lecturer.*

> *I have a tremendous relationship with my mentor who's very, very supportive. Very, very good when I get particularly stressed... I do tend to think oh this is a terribly serious problem and I'm told, no, quite frankly, it's infinitesimally small in the scheme of things so yeah, it's there and I'm quite glad to have that system, I find it very helpful.*

For the following respondent, her mentor did not display the practical help she hoped would be forthcoming:

> *So I got some support from my probation advisor, which was good. Not a lot though. Like I did the legwork for myself... he said, 'oh, I don't mind being a kind of investigator on this with you' but then when he sort of realised what had to be done on the application, he said, oh that's too much bother. I'm happy for you to go ahead and do it on your own.*

Other institutions split the mentoring role, assigning someone to oversee teaching, and another academic to advise on research matters. This does not necessarily resolve the issue of who a probationer should approach when confronted with difficulties:

> *To be honest, my teaching mentor's absolutely the loveliest man on the planet but I am fully aware that he is so busy teaching and he's incredibly overloaded with work... we have had meetings but it's a struggle for him to find time so I don't often ask him for his advice, not because I don't value it... I just think I'm over-burdening him with more activities... My research mentor is a very nice lady but I basically, I went and said to her once I think probably we should have a research meeting. And we did, so that was me talking and that was it really. She's very nice and I'm sure if I had a problem she'd, but she's not going to mentor me really.*

There is some limited evidence that institutional procedures are not necessarily well thought-through, and this weakness can result in inappropriate choices being made on behalf of new academics:

> *Well somebody volunteered to be my mentor which I thought was nice, but unfortunately it hasn't worked for lots of reasons, one of which is he's still doing his PhD part time whilst teaching. Which is fine except for the fact that I'm supposed to be the person that oversees his PhD work, which doesn't really work I don't think, if he's supposed to be my mentor. I think they got the wrong person.*

There is perhaps less oversight of mentoring procedures than those in place for monitoring formal taught courses. Where a mentoring relationship works well, clearly this is of benefit to the probationer. However, this process can be a distinct weakness, in that not enough thought is put into selecting and training appropriate mentors. Less formal mentoring – '*learning on the job'* (Knight, Tait and Yorke, 2006) – is sometimes felt to be more effective. Some further attention might need to be paid to how the structural factors of initial professional development and formal mentoring are formulated, and thus experienced by probationary academics. These issues are taken up further in the discussion section of the chapter. Now, attention is turned to those elements recognised as key areas of the academic role: teaching, research and administration.

Other academic expectations – teaching

In the UK context, different disciplinary areas tend towards slightly different arrangements for exposure to teaching duties for PhD and post-doctoral researchers. This means that when probationers are appointed, they will have varying degrees of experience of teaching. In STEM disciplines, it is common for research students to undertake lab demonstration duties, but rare, even at post-doctoral level, to undertake formal lecturing. In the social sciences, PhD students often take on significant tutorial duties, and late in their candidature, can sometimes also be responsible for lecture courses. These differences can persist in the first

academic appointment. Two of the science/engineering probationers drew attention to this:

> *When I came here, I asked for some teaching because there was a debate about, they'd just give me nothing, no teaching in the first year. But I have no research grant either so I said, look, I want to teach...*

> *I've been doing tutorials and lab classes. I haven't been doing a lecture course yet... I'll probably have to do something in time for next year.*

This contrasts with most new appointments in social sciences, who take on a formal teaching load immediately:

> *Straight away [laughs]. In the first week.*

> *I joined in August, so it's two months and a bit... I have had to set the exam paper for [subject] and it's something that I have thought about quite a lot because I designed the module based on the module descriptor that already existed here so I had some flexibility but not a huge amount.*

Another social scientist had a slightly more gentle introduction to the teaching role:

> *I have given one or two guest lectures here and there throughout the first semester, but otherwise I only teach in the second semester. I co-teach with the leader of our teaching and research group, and it is a third year module. So in that sense, I got to learn what a lot of the teaching requirements were in terms of what was the norm in assessment and class sizes and learning how to interact and what they expect.*

Clearly it can be helpful for a probationary lecturer to team teach, as this respondent suggests, in order to get a feel for requirements. She continued, however:

> *I think I was very lucky that I was co-teaching. So I learnt some of those things not because the colleague who I was working with taught me. I actually, I had to ask others really. What I couldn't learn just by seeing what she did, I'd ask others. She wasn't particularly helpful at all and we actually, we didn't really get along. It was a bit of a baptism of fire actually.*

Any benefits that might accrue from a team-teaching approach are unlikely to be realised if, as in formal mentoring relationships, the personalities involved clash. All of the participants in the resonant category acknowledged their much reduced teaching loads. Reducing the workload did not equate, however, to being assigned comfortable teaching duties, whether in engineering or the social sciences:

> *Yeah, I enjoy teaching, but what I'm not 100% comfortable with, with the teaching I'm doing at the moment, is that I'm teaching stuff that I don't understand to a much greater degree than the students do. Well, it's not that I don't understand. I haven't done it for so long and don't have in-depth knowledge of it and it makes it a bit difficult because it's not uncommon for students to ask questions that I can't answer.*

Similarly, a new professional educator, whose experience was in secondary education, found himself with extensive teaching duties into the primary programme. It appears, as Huston (2009) has reported, that teaching unfamiliar topics is a widespread practice, and expected even of novice lecturers. Despite the challenges associated with new material and new practices, the respondents in the resonant category were all enjoying their teaching. Some had been concerned about this aspect of the role, and had been pleasantly surprised by the rewards teaching can bring:

I'm surprised at how much I like the teaching. Everything I've done so far has been so research-focused and I've been in an environment with people who are very much research intensive and if anything will tend to whinge about the teaching. I was a bit unsure about how I would cope with a lectureship... I am enjoying the teaching, I'm just very acutely aware that I don't really know what I'm doing [laughs].

Two of the female social scientists, particularly, were especially ambitious with regard to their teaching:

It's that balance between research and teaching that I think lots of people find very difficult and that I'm not currently that concerned about because I always said that my first year at least was about establishing the teaching and getting my head around that and developing as a teacher...

She has very high expectations of herself in the teaching role. Some apprehension in her early interviews about her teaching ability has been alleviated by positive student evaluations, reinforcing her desire to become a good teacher:

I've been thinking about delivery and changing courses and stuff, I probably spend quite a lot of time thinking well, how can I do this and what are the alternatives and playing around with ideas... I think passing the PGCert, continuing to get those kinds of evaluations will reassure me that I'm doing my job competently, I don't think I'll ever be doing it good enough for me and actually I think the minute I do think I'm doing it good enough I need to stop because there's always something you can do better and I know I'm never going to be 100% satisfied with how I'm doing either in research or teaching...

The second probationer's ambitions in teaching extended to trying to find a network of like-minded colleagues, and some kind of recognition for teaching excellence:

At [previous institution] there was a lot of emphasis on research, but an equal amount on teaching so there were a lot of national and state government teaching awards as well as university teaching awards so there was a lot of incentives... it was looked upon very favourably if you were striving to get teaching awards and it actually made you really want to be a very good teacher.

Her enthusiasm stretches to making her teaching activity potentially part of her research focus:

I'm actually planning next year to try and do some kind of action learning project... And it's something that I could write up in a higher education journal if I wanted to.

The institutional context, however, sent other signals:

Literally I can quote a few people saying to me, don't spend too much time on teaching, no-one cares. If it's taking time away from your research, don't do it.

Whilst there appeared to be little support for her desire to innovate in teaching, in another institution, one probationer felt the reverse:

I'm enjoying the undergrad teaching, although it's a bit different from what I thought it would be. I suppose there's a lot of pressure to be innovative in your teaching and your assessments these days.

If formal teaching is enjoyable, but there are institutional contexts which diverge in terms of support for innovation in practice, one aspect of teaching, across a range of institutions, was not especially welcome:

I think that we have some role in pastoral care... but if it's a personal issue... then I think that we should find them the best help to get rather than trying to provide the help ourselves... But I know that a lot

of, or at least a few of our staff feel it's their responsibility to provide that extra support. I'm not trained in that at all and I wouldn't like to feel that I could give that kind of support because I'm not qualified.

I think some people just do though have a very easy empathy with students. I try and be approachable. I think they don't find me too unapproachable but I don't think they find me cuddly. You ask, any problems? Most of them, the ones that aren't in tears, they go no... It's [the pastoral dimension] not surprised me, I expected it. I think what surprised me, if anything, is how difficult I find it. I think it's my least favourite part of the job.

Feeling unprepared for pastoral duties was a common theme for these probationers. This was compounded by worries about how to account for the time pastoral work consumed:

Teaching, research, administration, there's probably many other things that don't fit as categories that we do that sometimes take up a lot of time and it's come up so many times with the workload model and with this diary as well, there are things that we do that just don't fit those categories... and one of the things that I'm often quite struck by, it has been coming out here, that especially new women academics seem to get lumbered with an awful lot of the kind of pastoral care, touchy feely stuff that other people can't be bothered to do.

Pastoral work in general caused difficulties for probationers, either because of their concerns about their effectiveness in their roles, or because it is a time consuming activity that does not feature in workload models they must use to account for their time. There is evidence, however, that support for individual students with clear goals is viewed as a different and more satisfying category of activity:

I've also had a student who's interested in applying for a PhD and I was one of the people that he'd contacted, an international student.

And he was back and forth, back and forth with all these questions about filling in his application.

One thing that really stands out, I've mentioned the student who got the place at the [overseas institution], I think he's a real success story... and I was just really excited by that and I did his reference and checked his application and we sat and talked about it quite a lot.

Acquiring and developing teaching skills is important for those in the resonant category. Enjoying their teaching is also important, even when they initially had anxieties about it due to lack of prior experience. The pastoral dimension of teaching activity seems more problematic, but where students have positive, rather than negative, issues – such as a need for time-consuming scholarship or reference applications – this is viewed more benignly. This is perhaps because of the close connections many probationers in this category made between their teaching and research, suggesting a desire to encourage students to achieve in similar ways to themselves (Haggis, 2003).

Other academic expectations – research

It is clear from the accounts of the probationers in the resonant stance that they were passionate about their research, and aware of its role in passing probation. Only two of the participants in this category (both male social scientists, one in a pre-92 and one in a post-92) did not yet have research activity as a particular priority:

One of the real things I've been struggling with for the longest time, the research I've done has basically been following on from someone else's ideas so I've been working, collaborating with other people instead of just going ahead... but now I've actually got an opportunity to develop my own so I've spent quite a bit of time just thinking what would I actually like to research... developing a research specialism,

something I can sink my teeth into academically and then beyond that still I'm going to end up doing a PhD... I would like to think that the research that I do would in some way be meaningful... finding something that is significant and can have meaningful impact, yeah.

And then eventually I'll go and maybe do some further kind of research... I don't know when and I don't know what yet but certainly at some point, yeah, I would like to do that.

For the remaining eight participants in this section of the sample, continuing their research activity is rather more pressing. Not having enough time to do so in the early days of a lectureship is an issue of concern for some, even with a reduced teaching load:

So I don't feel like I'm being disadvantaged with my research in terms of teaching. What I think, and is the case for any academic, I think is just there isn't enough hours to do all the roles you're given.

The predominance of externally-funded research is clear for those in STEM disciplines:

I enjoy a lot of my research... so I anticipate being able to spend a fair bit of time on that now and my research has got some exciting stuff coming up with one project and I'm in the middle of a grant proposal for a major project. I suspect it will be, in reality, it'll take me a couple of years to get hold of that grant...

I've got a post-doc working for me at the moment part time but I'm not going to be able to retain him much longer because financially I don't have a grant for him.

In the scientific disciplines, there is an early realisation that research activity will become more a case of managing the work of others:

> *And it's been like this since my PhD for me really, and very little doing anything yourself, you're just co-ordinating everybody else.*

At the 'harder' (Biglan, 1973) end of the social sciences, research may still require special equipment but the imperative of *'landing a big grant'* does not appear to be quite so strong, although it is still recognised as a positive for probation:

> *You're involved in collaborations with people in other areas... I've got a few projects in mind that I will be starting in the summer holidays because they're more in-house projects... I suppose what I'm kind of thinking about at the moment is in terms of actually trying to get some grants in, actually bring in some money. I mean I've got a nice lab around the corner but I'd quite like to have research staff of my own...*

Collaborative work, or the donation of equipment, or previous university investment in specific areas, seems to make starting up research less problematic than for those in science and engineering disciplines in terms of access to equipment or staff resources. In 'soft, applied' (Biglan, 1973) areas:

> *You know it's not necessarily about getting bigger and better grants or anything but just keeping doing the kind of research that I'm interested in. [Grants] they're not unimportant but you know it's not the case oh I've got an ESRC one under my belt now so I'll try for a European one next, it's more where's the money for the kind of stuff I want to do...*

Some of the probationers in this category explicitly linked their teaching duties to their research roles in a very productive manner:

> *The list of research projects came round and you realise that some of them are just rehashes of projects that have been done in the past. I've brought out two research projects this year that I genuinely want*

to see some research done on. I genuinely think it could be publishable.

So I think teaching and research are the biggest responsibilities and research definitely informs my teaching. I like to bring in data and information that I have learnt from my own research into what I'm teaching. And I think that's really important. For me, it makes my teaching more meaningful and more enjoyable as well.

One social scientist in a post-92 institution felt that this linkage was important too (Jenkins and Healey, 2005). This was a view endorsed by her university but it became clear that practice lagged behind policy to the detriment of both teaching and research:

And also there's a new kind of directive from the university that all research must inform teaching. So if I'm a [subject] specialist and I'm not doing the [subject] teaching then how does that fit? So I am now doing all the stuff I did last year plus extra stuff.

The importance – and enjoyment – of research plays a key role for these probationers as they seek to establish their academic identities, but it does not dominate other aspects of their new roles. For the two participants without a current research agenda, it is clearly an aspirational goal but one which will not interfere with their concern for teaching. The difficulty of establishing research in a new environment, however, should not be underestimated. Related to this is a concern for the results of research: negotiating the publication agenda.

The goal of publication

Enthusiasm for research is often accompanied by a desire to publish. Getting published, however, is an activity that can be time-consuming and potentially frustrating (Murray, 2009), and for some, there is a temptation – in the frequent absence of concrete expectations – to compare themselves unfavourably to more established colleagues:

... my research profile. I think last year I should have put out far more than I did so this year I'm really trying to bulk up the papers... I'm a shadow compared to [colleague's] output. [Discussing lengthy submission-publication lags] that just freaked me right out, that left me with you know, only one publication in the whole of 2006, and I thought oh shit, just one, that looks like crap when I come to do my annual review...

Probing their views of publication rates, it transpired that this probationer was comparing himself with a head of department, and there were other similar comparisons. There was no apparent pressure with regard to RAE eligibility, as these interviews were conducted in 2007, just months from the submission deadline. Because of this, therefore, it may be that these probationers were less aware of satisfactory performance levels regarding publication.

Other strategies for publishing included a scatter-gun approach and taking on a lot of different writing tasks:

I've got lots of writing to do at the moment... a conference paper and presentation, I'm writing a book chapter at the moment... and I've been writing that one [journal paper] for a really long time with my PhD supervisor, it's come back and forth quite a few times.

I wrote a review last year and I'm writing another one now. That was a suggestion that [a colleague] made. He said well look, if you're going to move into this completely new area, write a review about it and go to one of the big player journals... you're already effectively published in the area before you start moving into it... the new metrics [for the REF] are going to be big on citation and nothing gets cited like a review.

This latter probationer, interviewed across the 2007-08 academic year, seems more focused on maximising potential returns on his publishing activity, especially in

terms of looking ahead to what will follow the RAE. He referred to his colleague's suggestion of writing reviews as '*devious*'; it can, perhaps, be seen more positively as a strategic approach to academic publishing.

Being resilient, and persistent (Becker, 1986), are recognised as useful qualities in pursuing a publication agenda:

> *I've submitted a book proposal based on the PhD which has come back a couple of times generally quite good feedback but just too narrow, not quite right for our list sort of thing. I submitted one journal paper which annoyingly is getting very good feedback but is not getting published but it's been to two journals, both of which have said we love this paper but it's not right for our journal try so-and-so... it's with [journal name] now so we'll just see, it'll go in somewhere eventually, it's just, there's obviously not a problem with the paper, it's just a problem with the home for it.*

By the final interview with this probationer, the off-print of the article was sitting on her desk, reward for her persistence in rewriting and refining her ideas of how to target appropriate journals (Murray, 2009). Where the combination of topic and approach had proved problematic for this new lecturer in where to 'place' papers for publication, another interviewee had carefully weighed up the merits of quantity versus quality, and was able to identify clear target journals:

> *My policy with papers is to try and get them into the highest quality journal I can and then work my way down, which has worked for me but it also means it's quite time consuming... I don't get a lot of papers out, I tend to just get them into decent journals when they go.*

As a life scientist, she was keenly aware of balancing writing demands between papers and grants. Satisfied with her publication history, her focus across the academic year was on pursuing research income. Building a research team through external funding, she argued, would naturally give rise to further publications.

Frequently, STEM disciplines tend to publish from team-based research. But the harder end of social science can also adopt this approach:

> *I've also got postgraduate students who are doing research... It's quite nice to have people who are actually doing things and you're not responsible for conducting all of it. They're doing stuff... a certain amount of that comes down to what the results say basically, you know, if this is stuff that's publishable.*

These different strategies can be more or less productive. What is clear is that new lecturers in this category are keenly aware that publication rates are a key indicator of progress during probation. It is less clear, however, whether they have an accurate picture of what is expected. Probationers draw on a variety of strategies to achieve publication, but writing for publication is one activity most frequently pushed to the margins (Murray, 2009) as they try to meet all the demands of academic work.

Other academic expectations – administration

Academic work is usually portrayed, as it was by all the participants in this study, as a trinity of research, teaching and administration. The latter category is usually seen as a distraction from the 'real business' of academic life, and is an aspect said to be on the increase in an increasingly risk-averse (McWilliam, 2009) sector. These probationers suggested that either they were protected from the worst administrative demands, there was definitely too much of it, or that it was not as serious a problem as others made out. For the two respondents in post-1992 institutions, said to be more managerialist (Watson, 2009) than the pre-1992 sector, the quantity of administration does seem to be a very real problem:

> *All the bureaucracy that goes with the post. It's just mind-numbing... I wouldn't mind going to a meeting if something was actually decided there and then about it but when you go it's all just hot air that's going around and I'm just twiddling my thumbs... I do feel sometimes it's*

paperwork for paperwork's sake... [asked for an example] two years before I arrived all of our courses were validated. Well we've just gone through our revalidation process because of this new regime that's come into being, so it's just things like that.

These views, in the first interview of the cycle, had not changed much by the end of the academic year:

... the reports that go to various committees further up the tree who, you kind of wonder whether they actually get read or not... we've already talked about that, the bureaucracy and I said that right at the start, I'm not in to red tape.

In some pre-1992 institutions, clear steps are taken to protect probationers from too much admin:

I don't find the systems particularly bureaucratic. I don't have any specific admin role to do even though I said I'm happy to.

Others also commented on the absence of specific administrative duties, particularly committee work. Where duties had been allocated, for the most part, in early interviews, these were not seen an onerous:

I can't get too annoyed about it simply because it's just part of the job and everyone has to do their share of it. I don't feel I've been burdened with piles of it here, it's quite fairly spread out...

Later in the year, however, as other responsibilities have grown, administration can become a source of annoyance:

I had no idea just how many little jobs were involved... jobs that when I first got them were fairly light in terms of workload, but towards the end of the semester they suddenly become slightly more intense. So little things like that again are just cranking up the pressure a little

bit... you just absorb them all into your routine and none of them are particularly onerous. Dull is probably more appropriate. I mean who wants to wander around with a clipboard making sure the fire extinguishers are recently checked...

Appropriateness in terms of administrative duties is an issue, as to whether this should fall to a new member of academic staff. And where administration is concerned, complaints of silliness can always be found:

One issue came to light just yesterday, my students got their grades yesterday. And in the afternoon I got a couple of emails saying, oh, I didn't do as well as what I expected... So I checked and the marks were wrong because when we entered the marks on the spreadsheet we were given I had the marks out of 40 and 60 [coursework and exam] and they should have been percentages out of 100... they could actually tell you what they want on the spreadsheet in the first place, couldn't they?

I got arsey with [research council] for sending back a grant application because the CVs attached to it weren't in the right font...

These probationers took responsibility for their errors, knowing it was part of their role to ensure that these administrative functions were done correctly. Reasonably, however, they did wonder how they were supposed to be in possession of the information to make sure they got things right.

The agentic dimension

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the agentic dimension is the primary feature of difference in the experiences of, and responses to, the APP. This section of the chapter investigates three themes that emerged from interview talk – self-efficacy (Dweck, 2000), professionally-significant others and work-life balance – that distinguishes probationary academics in the resonant category from those who are

the focus of the following chapters on dissonant and rejection stances towards probation.

Self-efficacy as key to resonance

> *I suppose that's one thing, having something good that you don't want to lose it. If I was in a shit university in a shit position, I'd probably be going, yeah, whatever, but because I know I've found something special I really want to hold on to it. That's something perhaps I hadn't thought of before that, it's having something good, something to look forward to...*

The spirit of the interviews with those categorised into the resonant stance towards probation all held this sense of having 'arrived', of being pleased with their new roles and having the power to shape them in ways of their choosing (Clegg, 2008). Undoubtedly, these probationers face challenges, whether to do with departmental cultures, formal probationary demands or the pressures of generating research income or publishing. What they share are resilience and persistence and take responsibility for managing themselves and their workload. There is a wide range of frustrations, illustrated above, but overall, for these new lecturers, academic life is experienced as rewarding Clegg (2008) reflected in many positive comments:

> *Yeah, I think for the most part it's really, probably about as good as it gets. Well, not as good as it gets, but I think for the big things, like colleagues and work environment and atmosphere and all that kind of thing, I really can't say anything negative about it.*

Probationers in the resonant stance recognise opportunities and express a willingness to exploit them:

> *... the freedom you get to be able to just, I mean, if you're working for a company, you're tied by their research objectives and their commercial objectives essentially. Whereas if you're doing research*

> *in academia, then you can just do whatever you want, providing you can find someone to fund it.*

It is not just with respect to research that this freedom is felt. There is also a positive sense of making a difference in teaching when personal autonomy can be exercised:

> *So to have that control over the module. If I'd inherited a module it would have been quite different. So having done it all myself, that was really satisfying for me and it's something that I have looked forward to doing... And to have done that this semester and realised, well I'm already doing this, I'm teaching something that reflects what I'm doing in my research, that was really relevant for me.*

One desire was the significance of recognition:

> *And it had looked like I had nothing to show for the past few years of research. So it was a really big relief to start being published and now that ball is rolling it should open up doors for more things now to make a name for myself, and hopefully a good name.*

For all bar one in the resonance category, the aspiration is towards good, novel, meaningful research, and these probationers have a sense of academic identity that requires active participation in research. For the remaining participant research is not yet part of his role, but he sees it becoming so in time. There is a sense that probationers want to use their enthusiasm for research to inform their teaching. All but the new teacher educator (who already has this status) supported the idea that they should be professionally qualified to teach (Gibbs and Coffey, 2004), even if they had some difficulties with aspects of the actual IPD on offer (Knight, Tait and Yorke, 2006).

All – except the new teacher educator who is being ground down by institutional change and bureaucracy (Trowler, 1998) – see an academic career as a long-term prospect, and many are ambitious to reach the highest levels:

I can't really imagine doing anything else... Ultimate ambition, professorship. It's got to be, has to be, but for me at the minute I see myself very much as staying in that academic role that has a bit of everything... I don't see myself at some point in the future wanting to take a more management sort of role... never say never... but that's not where I see my role at the minute.

In asking about aspirations for their career, however, most, like the probationary lecturer above, saw themselves retaining research as a primary goal, eschewing any ambition in the direction of management roles:

I suppose that's pretty much all I aspire to do. Useful research... When this strategic review was announced, I put the thing in for where I see research going... And it's just bizarre because there's me, and everyone else is a prof... getting involved in that has taken up a lot of my time and I'm not sure if that's a good or bad thing, but it's not going to help me academically unless I plan to stop being an academic and become a strategic manager.

Junior academic roles appear to be very rewarding and promotion the logical next step. It seems, however, that there was no sense for all but one of these probationers that management duties might be equally rewarding (Winter, 2009). The one who felt this direction may be a possibility had become involved very early on in forms of institutional research and evaluation:

I mean, one of the things it did for me was to make me realise that I can actually function on that level and that's something I wasn't entirely sure of... I never intended to do that but it was interesting... I mean it increased my confidence, that's probably the biggest thing and also made me aware of a different dynamic in the management side of things, the organisational side of things... and it was really eye-opening in one sense but it was also liberating because it made

> *me realise that should I ever wish to become a bigger cog I could, not sure I want to [laughs] but I could, yeah.*

Managerial responsibilities or hybrid roles (Gordon and Whitchurch, 2010) do not appear to be what many probationary academics aspire to. Management is seen as unrewarding, but apart from the teacher educator who did recognise the increasing administrative burden, these new lecturers feel that research excellence will ultimately satisfy their intended career trajectories. The participants in the resonant category, apart from some minor grumbles, expressed an almost universal satisfaction in their roles. Whilst a good deal of this stemmed from their academic freedom (Clegg, 2008), some of it was supplied by former and current colleagues, and mentoring relationships.

The role of professionally-significant others

As detailed above, those in this category were positive about their roles and potential. Another element that fed in to their contentment was the existence of an established, or welcoming, network of colleagues (Knight, Tait and Yorke, 2006). This was not always immediately apparent, however, most especially for the international academics:

> *I felt like I was a bit of an impostor and that was actually adding a considerable amount of stress... the annual review as I mentioned before, the fact that you know, even getting one successful thing, like you're doing fine... that and talking to colleagues...*

By the end of his second year, this probationer was feeling more confident, and had established some good relationships:

> *He's pretty eminent in his field and I know a lot of people that I've talked to have said, oh, he's difficult to work with... but that wasn't the case at all. I just treated him as a peer, a peer who I certainly look up*

> *to but you know, I thought rather than be intimidated by him I'm going to try and get the most out of this collaboration...*

The second international academic found it harder to break into any kind of departmental or research networks:

> *It's weird I suppose to say that I want to go to a staff meeting but being new, it would have made it easier to get to know a few people... When I first came, my office was it and I would sit here all day and not see a soul... by the end of the first semester I was actually quite angry and I had thought to myself if I knew this is what it was going to be like, I don't think I would have come.*

Fortunately, this situation resolved itself, but took a good deal of time and persistence on the part of the probationer. By the time of her second interview, the social side of work was beginning to develop:

> *I'm feeling a lot more settled and a lot more comfortable with knowing colleagues, and feeling that colleagues actually know me... The people who I tend to feel more close with in terms of research aren't in my group... I can't do it by myself... so I think I'm going to need to be a little bit more forward in approaching them.*

And again, by the time of her final interview, she had worked harder still to develop relationships:

> *But now I think I'm more connected with certain colleagues as well. So I get to find out more things by word of mouth... to not know anything ever was really difficult. I suppose I feel part of the school... so I tend to pick up things just in personal conversations.*

She suggested that those in positions of authority – in this case, the head of department – had a real role to play in facilitating the integration of new staff:

I've always talked about this whole social thing and settling in... I thought it was just me because I was new and I didn't have any friends and I wanted to make friends... you need to have that, it makes the job so much more rewarding and worthwhile and you need it to connect. And a while back I had lunch with a colleague and we were walking back to our offices and the head of school came by who has a reputation for not being a particularly social person... and she said to us how nice it is to see so many colleagues out socially and how sometimes we underestimate this social contact. And I was gobsmacked, I thought well I'm so glad that I've heard you say that but you don't go about actually making those opportunities happen for us.

This contrasts with another head of department who clearly saw his role as facilitating the integration of new colleagues. Joining a friendly, sociable department can prove invaluable in helping probationary lecturers to settle in:

The whole department is a very, it's great since I came here, very collegial, it really is. And we've got an attitude fostered here, not purely just by the head of department but he encourages it, that people will knock on each other's doors and have a chat...

This facilitative approach is clearly appreciated, and the difference it can make to early career experience was articulated particularly sharply by one respondent:

I've worked in a department before where the head of department isn't viewed so favourably and is looked at as more of a tyrant, even a sort of Machiavellian figure... it does colour a department from top to bottom...

It is not wise to underestimate the influence of colleagues (Knight, Tait and Yorke, 2006), and the need to build an academic network, as important factors for probationary lecturers. Achieving this kind of network is neither quick nor easy, especially for those who begin their academic careers in another country (Green

and Myatt, 2011). However, it is similarly important for those who have come through the UK system, and, perhaps, a marker of their changed status (Archer, 2008b) to the successful establishment of an academic career.

A concern for work-life balance

The final strand of the personal, agentic dimension of this study was not enquired after directly within the interview schedule (see Appendix 2). The interview schedule had been constructed to enquire after the professional dimensions of being new to academic life. In keeping with good interview practice, however, an opportunity was given to respondents at the end of each meeting to contribute anything that was important (Schostak, 2006) to them that had not already been covered. It is here that the personal-professional emerged, and it is clear that for some, personal factors and the notion of work-life balance can be significant influences. As might be expected, the impact of striking a work-life balance was felt very keenly by the international academics, due to the considerable personal resources required to relocate globally. Even the mundane can feel challenging:

> *But the process of coming from overseas and dealing with people and red tape in personnel was also very difficult, trial and error as to who to contact and how things worked... I suppose these are more personal things about how do you go about renting or buying a place to live... and what's council tax? And how do we get a TV licence, well, what's a TV licence?*

Academia is a highly mobile profession, even within the UK. But when international relocation is involved, a lack of information, be it about everyday practices or institutional policies, can have an impact on a new academic's sense of self:

> *It must have been my second week here because we stayed in a hotel in town for two weeks, which was what was allowed by the university. And it was getting to the end of the two weeks and we hadn't found anywhere [to live]. I was getting quite worried that we*

weren't going to find a place, that we were going to have to stay longer and that we were going to have to start paying. And having come from a very meagre wage, having to cover everything myself...

The most basic need, of a place to live to begin to feel settled, feeds into feelings of self-efficacy in the professional sphere:

I was presenting a lecture for 200 students. I was still living in a little hotel room. So those things really did have an impact on what I was doing here. And I ended up having to call somebody in personnel and ask well, can this happen, what they're doing to us [having to find a deposit] in terms of renting this place... And I was here in my office in tears. It was horrible. And it had a really big impact.

This academic had moved to the UK with her partner, newly-qualified as a teacher but currently without a job. The upheaval of relocation feeds into her feelings of self-efficacy about her own role. This issue is amplified for the second international academic, moving from a contract research position to a lectureship elsewhere in the UK, who needed to consider his partner's needs:

So for me there was no choice [taking the lectureship], even though it meant taking my wife yet again from a good job and completely going to the other side of the country and all the upset it involved. And it involved a pretty considerable amount of upset, I mean she was hugely unhappy for about six months... and I felt like a complete prick. For ages, I thought, have I done the right thing? Yeah, there was a long period when things were not so hot, you know, so that affected things.

These new academics seem to feel somewhat infantilised by just not knowing how some things are done, and this impacts on their professional selves, where they are used to getting things done. But it is not just travel from abroad that raises issues about work-life balance. Other issues include drawing firm boundaries between 'work' and 'life':

My house doesn't really lend itself to home working anyway because of the number of small unruly people wandering around screaming and banging things.

There's no competition between my professional life and my home, personal life. If they were ever in conflict, professional life would lose out undoubtedly. My life outside work is very important to me and it's something that I don't compromise on. Another reason that I'm at [university] is that I refuse to move. I just wouldn't move for a job.

But some have a harder time with this demarcation:

I think I chucked that in last time, I said, you know, how I was finding it difficult to marry the job with the personal... work carrying over into personal time...

Well, I think it's a sort of mild irritation to my other half that I don't, I wouldn't say that I spend all my time thinking about work, but if I'm at home in an evening, I won't necessarily be doing work.... sometimes it's something that I can just think about... It's something you can just think about better when you're sat down having a glass of wine with dinner or something. Your thinking is freer. Everything gets a bit fuzzy at the boundaries, I wouldn't say that I have a distinction between what's work and what's private life.

These probationers are conscious that work can expand to fill the time available. Some have devised strategies to cope with this and ensure that they draw firm boundaries, whilst others accept the expansion. Focusing, in this study, on the probationary period, means that the consequences of blurring work-life – and the potential for burnout – cannot be speculated on here.

One final point, however, needs to be raised within this sub-section, and this issue came exclusively from female participants in this study. Balancing academic life with

the demands of a family, for three of the five female participants in this section of the sample, gave them cause for concern, and they were not reluctant to admire – and take advice from – more senior female academics who had managed this balance. Female academics who had combined career success with motherhood were much admired:

> *[talking about her PhD supervisor] I like the way she has managed, as a woman, to balance academic and family life, she's got four kids, I mean she's always managed somehow to balance her career with her family life and on that side I've got nothing but admiration for her.*

Involvement in institutional research looking at female progression in academic careers seemed to reinforce how difficult this balance was to achieve for one respondent:

> *Overall, it's quite depressing... we haven't spoken to anybody who has a work-life balance... well they have but it doesn't include much life... and there are things about progression that are so clearly gendered... if you're single or you don't have any family responsibilities then you can do your research whenever, you can work 80 hours a week... but people who've got any kind of commitments outside of work are never going to be able to compete... I'm not necessarily talking about overt discrimination although I think that's still around as well. I think there are some big problems about recognising women who take time out to have children, the university just can't handle that... cannot look at research pro-rata... and that puts women at a huge disadvantage.*

Another female probationer was also equally concerned about the impact of children on her academic career:

> *And so this is my PhD supervisor, who became Head of School, and being a woman, a very young woman becoming a professor, she was in her early 40s, head of school, professor, I think that's very*

admirable but in saying that, she sacrificed a lot in terms of family... I'd seen the struggles that she'd had in her personal life that she's had to sacrifice to achieve that, so I admire what she's done but I wouldn't necessarily see myself going down the same track.

Because of this observation she actively sought out a colleague who had combined the two roles, hoping to learn from her experience:

There's a colleague here who I don't know her very well personally but she, I suppose, in a way is opposite to the person that I've just described, she's a new professor... I have spoken to her about being a woman in academia and I wanted to speak to her specifically because I knew that she was married and had children so I wanted to see how, what it was like for her and how she did it. Because so many women I knew back in [former institution] who were at that level had sacrificed their families... And I didn't want that to happen to me.

These probationers are concerned about the potentially gendered nature of career progression. They seem keenly aware of the demands involved in establishing themselves academically and how this might be in tension with their aspirations for family life. Another respondent had experienced this tension directly:

Certainly, before I took this position, I was pregnant during my last postdoc and the attitude towards me changed dramatically. Somehow I was seen no longer as somebody that was really serious about research [that still happens?] Yeah and I had two job interviews before the position that I accepted while being pregnant which was very naive on my part. Of course I didn't get considered.

She reflected on this experience and concluded that some attitudes towards women, family and academic life were difficult to change:

> *In fact I wouldn't be surprised if he never employs another child bearing age woman as a postdoc as a result of that... which I felt a bit guilty about, but I thought I can't not have children because it doesn't fit somebody else.*

Discussion: identity stability

Some strong themes emerged from the data regarding key influences on the APP. First, there were positive interpretations of the potentiality offered by academic roles. Second, a good degree of resilience was voiced, but also some minor frustrations. Third, probationers reported warmly on the collegiality of their new departments, though clearly, for some there were also some challenges in terms of fitting in to an established unit. Lastly, some difficulties with institutional demands and gender issues were raised. These themes are discussed further in this section related to the notion of 'identity stability' as a distinguishing feature of this analytic category.

Potentiality

Clegg (2008) writes persuasively of academics (though she was talking of far more experienced staff) retaining the space for '*principled personal autonomy'* in the face of the increasingly managerialist agendas in higher education (Davies and Petersen, 2005). From the evidence of the probationers in this section of the sample, there is a strong sense of academic freedom, of the potential to follow their own personal research agenda, and even to subvert the more overtly managerial processes that can sometimes frustrate academics. These probationers take the initiative to ignore workload allocation models or submit strategic research proposals, and seem in control of the agentic dimension (Archer, 2000) of their roles.

In contrast with the notion of disempowerment that Davies and Petersen (2005) report, opportunities are actively sought out by these new academics, and the

responsibility for establishing their academic reputations can be seen strongly in the data. The notion of developing a positive academic reputation comes through the desire for conducting meaningful research, publishing, and linking their teaching and research (Jenkins and Healey, 2005). A resonant stance towards probation is thus correlated with a strong sense of not only agency in the sense of a pursuit of a particular form of identity (Lawler, 2008) but also self-efficacy (Dweck, 2000). Despite sometimes challenging personal circumstances, these new academics appear to retain a strong focus on potential opportunities to further develop their academic credentials, and their aim is to become recognised in their chosen tribe (Becher and Trowler, 2001).

There appears to be little doubt about the value of teaching and research, as their specialisms still hold the potential for meaningful work worth pursuing (Clegg, 2008). This potential also extends itself to potentially supporting the next generation in their own image (Haggis, 2003) as can be seen by their determination to gain PhD students, build research groups, or spend time with students with similarly clear, academically-focused goals. These new academics may not always have clarity regarding what constitutes probationary expectations – and this is most evident in relation to publication performance – but there is a sense of conviction surrounding their grasp of the academic role. It is argued here that it is this sense of conviction of the ultimate meaningfulness of academic work that enables them to appreciate productive opportunities sometimes in the face of conflicting signals from their institutional context.

Resilience to contradiction

There are, of course, some grumbles about the conditions of academic work (Watson, 2009) most often around issues such as workload allocation, diversity of duties and the sometimes contradictory nature of institutional policy and practice. Whilst these issues can, and do, irritate, they do not serve as particular barriers that frustrate the pursuit of the probationary academics' goals. Encounters with institutional processes or funding council requirements are noted in the sense of becoming prepared not to make the same mistake twice, and then dismissed.

There are many sources of contradiction in academic life (Peseta and Grant, 2011). Drawing on Strathern's notion of audit cultures (2000), Peseta and Grant (2011) suggest that the inherent contradictions in institutional policies and practices can engender imaginative solutions. Rather than be disheartened by setbacks – especially in relation to getting published (Becker, 1986) or being assigned challenging teaching duties (Huston, 2009) – probationers in the resonant stance appear to have well-developed coping strategies to face challenges and move on.

This resilience is a marker of an incremental approach to self-efficacy advocated by Dweck (2000), where success comes from taking responsibility and expending further effort. This contrasts with the idea of infantilisation that comes with the increasing surveillance of all aspects of academic work (Davies and Petersen, 2005). The liminal space (Meyer and Land, 2003; 2005) appears to be a temporary condition that must be tolerated and a resilient attitude deployed towards any challenge, in the expectation that any currently troublesome issue will resolve itself in time.

Probationers in the resonant stance appear to be self-confident in the face of challenge, with little sense that their perception of their academic identity is fragile. They are determined to exercise agency in pursuit of what they consider to be suitable academic goals (Clegg, 2008). The self-representation in the interview talk (Schostak, 2006) of these probationers was for the most part confident, and focused on opportunity and success; but individual agency was only part of the story. The ethos of their immediate environment – the cultural aspect – was also acknowledged to play a role in their development, and it to the idea of collegiality that I turn in the next section of this discussion.

Collegiality

Becher and Trowler (2001) examined many aspects of disciplinary cultures, from the way research is organised to patterns of communication within such communities. They report on convergent practices in particular disciplines, and there is evidence from probationers in this study that this view still holds true. In some instances, however, it can be shown that new academics are employed

specifically to extend or broaden the reach of a department. Where Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice promotes the notions of 'joint enterprise' and 'shared repertoires', some probationers in the resonant stance feel there is little in the way of local community. Whilst this can be difficult, especially when it comes to building research collaborations (Becher and Trowler, 2001) or teaching unfamiliar material (Huston, 2009), resilience again comes to the fore, with probationers stressing overall the collegiality of their immediate environment.

What seems clear is the attribution of responsibility to senior colleagues, most usually heads of department, to facilitate integration into some kind of local community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Avenues of support for probationers do seem to be focused on immediate colleagues (Knight, Tait and Yorke, 2006), even where it is acknowledged that this is not always suitably specialised. A perception of positive departmental support, and concomitant minimised risk of criticism, enables new lecturers to retain their self-belief. Where McWilliam (2009) writes of increasing institutional risk aversion, probationers in the resonant category recognise that they have senior colleagues who will undertake advocacy on their behalf in the face of bureaucratic pressures. What appears to matter to the new lecturers in this section of the sample is that they believe they have this supportive community of practice (Wenger, 1998) even if it cannot provide all the resources they would like to be able to draw upon.

Local cultures, as Archer (1996) and Becher and Trowler (2001) assert, clearly have a significant role to play in the APP. This aspect of enculturation into academic roles may also, of course, be the site of cultural reproduction (Archer, 1996) which ensures that change is difficult to achieve (Trowler, 2008). If disciplinary cultures (Becher and Trowler, 2001) are easily perpetuated when the locus of enculturation remains within the academic department, the lever most often used to effect change will be institutional demands. The most visible of these is the increasing demand to conform to institutional and sectoral concerns regarding IPD. The concern for the professionalisation of teaching (Gibbs and Coffey, 2004) is thus the focus for the next section of this chapter.

The role and influence of initial professional development

A spectrum of views of the role of IPD – in the form of teaching qualifications – was offered by probationers in this section of the sample that is not unknown (Land, 2004; 2008). A good deal of support for being professionally qualified was articulated for the teaching aspect of the academic role, even if the outcome of undertaking IPD was less well-regarded. One worrying aspect was the report of declining enthusiasm for participation in the IPD agenda over time. Whilst many probationers expressed a desire to teach well, the institutional support on offer was not always felt to sustain them in this endeavour.

Issues around e-learning and assessment were the most heavily criticised, although for some there was also clearly an issue in terms of meeting assignment deadlines with respect to their actual involvement in teaching duties. This raises an important issue with respect to equitable practices, and whether all probationers have the potential to fulfil the requirements of PGCerts. In some cases, there were elements of concern over the time-consuming nature of participation (Donnelly, 2006), and in others the relevance of material was questioned (Comber and Walsh, 2008; Knight, Tait and Yorke, 2006). Others, however, even if they struggled with translating the generic nature of the course to their own subject-specific context (Comber and Walsh, 2008), were broadly supportive of being able to pursue a teaching qualification to feel better prepared for this aspect of their role.

Such engagement, especially where courses were focused on learning and teaching rather than academic practice (Brew and Boud, 1996) appears to be more variable, and especially for those in scientific and engineering disciplines, who struggle with both the nature of reflective practice (Schon, 1984; Kahn *et al.,* 2008) and the language of social science (Stierer, 2008). Even social scientists, however, can struggle with the demands of IPD where expectations can be poorly-framed or, as Kahn *et al.* (2008) suggest, a particular form of reflection that is poorly-understood is in operation. It is quite striking to note that the enjoyment of teaching did not appear to stem from learning more theoretically about it (Sadler, 2008).

Participation in a PGCert has become a more overt (Gosling, 2010), and often the only, explicit structural demand articulated as a probationary requirement, despite progress in other areas also being expected. Clarity is an issue with regard to progress reviews in terms of grants and publications; it also appears to be an issue in terms of engagement and/or completion of the teaching qualification and one where institutional signals can be seen to conflict. It is not difficult to suggest that more consistent, and convergent, policy and practice in this area could be achieved. A final concern for a subset of this population, however, clearly has some way to go to be resolved. Perceptions of gendered careers (Morley, 2003) arose for probationers, and are dealt with in the final sub-theme of this section.

The thorny issue of sexism

Of the five female academics categorised in the resonant stance, three expressed concerns about the gendered nature of academic work and what this might mean for their futures. Whilst two had nothing to say about balancing academic work with family life, it was clearly an issue for two more, and one provided evidence of the gendered division of labour (Morley, 2003) within the academy. Apart from one brief reference by a male social scientist about being a father (and how inconducive this was to working from home), the remaining men did not express similar concerns. This suggests that Morley's (2003) contention regarding gendered difficulties in assuming powerful academic identities remains an issue.

One of the female academics had actually undertaken institutional research on this topic (and the reference to a publicly-available report is deliberately omitted here to preserve confidentiality). She acknowledged that institutional policies were in place, and were, in fact, very strong to address any perception of institutional sexism. In practice, however, she remained concerned that her career might be materially affected by a career break to have children.

Whilst overall, those probationary academics in the resonant stance displayed a good deal of self-confidence and resilience, it is clear that for some academic women there are residual concerns about the impact of motherhood on career

trajectories. It is striking that these women have gone to the lengths of actively searching out successful academic women who have managed to balance career and family demands, specifically to learn from them how to juggle roles that they perceive will be in conflict. Indeed, one had used an unpleasant experience of sexist attitudes to help shape her choice of institution for her academic career.

Summary

The resonant trajectory is a smooth one that recognises current contexts, but allows the exercise of considerable agency. There are constraints on all social actions (Archer, 1996; Sayer, 2000), but in the resonant form of APP, constraints are not strong enough to reduce new academics to the purely performative subjects that Davies and Petersen (2005) report. There is clearly space for exercising autonomy (Clegg, 2008) notwithstanding the encroachment of a neoliberal agenda. The immediate working environment, in the shape of departmental ethos, appears to have a clear role to play here. Even where there are strategic moves to broaden the scope of a department by bringing in a multidisciplinary specialism or new methodological approach, it appears that the perception of a supportive and collegial environment impact positively on probationers. These are the stories of those with a 'traditional' academic baptism, who often have a very strategic focus on their careers.

Related to a productive environment is the probationers' sense of self, and the degree of self-efficacy (Dweck, 2000) that they bring, although clearly there may be more personal issues – such as a concern with work-life balance – that inform female academics' views of academic careers. For the most part, however, there is an unwavering assertion of self-confidence (but not over-confidence) and an investment in the meaningfulness of academic work.

Institutional demands, and the contradictions between them, are a little more troublesome, but not to the extent that they cause undue concerns for those probationers in the resonant stance. The major difficulty, expressed only from a female point of view, is the potential for conflict in marrying career and family life. Other structural requirements, such as IPD, are minor grumbles that may dent

morale (Watson, 2009) temporarily. Notably, however, for those whose experiences are categorised as resonant, they continued in this vein until the end of the interview process displaying no shift in position to either of the more troubled trajectories elaborated in the following two chapters. The dominant discourse of academics in the resonant category is one of self-fulfilment (Clegg, 2008) and not one of performativity (Davies and Petersen, 2005).

Chapter 5: Dissonance

> *it is like I'm a blank piece of paper that I cannot be trusted and there's something about it [having an annual work schedule] stamped approved on every page that I find particularly outrageous…*

This chapter draws on the evidence gathered that relates to probationary academics who displayed a dissonant stance towards probation.

Characteristics and proportion of the sample

The second of the major analytic categories, dissonance, also comprises ten of the 23 participants in this study. Seven men and three women from seven different institutions are represented in this category. Two worked in post-1992 universities and eight in a pre-1992 context. Four of the probationers were from overseas, three of whom had undertaken their PhD in the UK system. One UK respondent had undertaken his PhD abroad, and was in his first lectureship following a postdoctoral fellowship in Britain. Two others in this section of the sample also had experience of other academic roles (one abroad). Seven of these probationers had work experience outside of the university environment. This category also contains the unique example in this study, of an academic who was in his fourth year, having had his probation extended.

Interviews were conducted across the 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09 academic years. Four participants provided two interviews, and the remainder were interviewed three times, resulting in 26 interviews and 24 transcripts. One respondent did not wish to be audio-recorded, so handwritten notes were taken. Probationers in the dissonant stance also came from STEM (6) and social science (4) disciplines, but across a wider range of departments. At the time of writing (February 2011), six remain in post. A further three participants had moved to new posts, two abroad, but still in academic work. One had left higher education.

The cultural dimension: dissonance

I begin with the perceptions of institutional and departmental cultures of individuals in the dissonant stance towards probation. Comparison of the differing views of this and the preceding category are explored in Chapter 7.

Views of institutional culture

Whilst it can be difficult for probationary academics to gain insight into organisational structures, such structures can be all too apparent to those who need further resources to develop a new subject area. In a new and fast-moving field, one respondent worked in a department that had been nominated for an industry-standard award, but had a particular view on how little this appeared to be appreciated by the university:

> *It feels like a positive thing [the development of a new subject area] is being quietly strangled by the institution... I think one image that occurred to me yesterday was if a small group of people achieve excellence in a sea of mediocrity that's seen as a threat by pretty much everyone around them. It's not seen as a positive step forward by the institution, it's seen as a destabilising force that threatens everyone else.*

His identification of what he saw as empty rhetoric was contrasted with organisational structures of 'command and control' that disincentivise individuals from exercising initiative:

> *Which is tragic really because there's all this rhetoric talked by the management of the institution about change and about excellence... but there's very little practical engagement with what that actually means on the ground. And a lot of the structures put in place actually*

run counter to those things being achieved. You know, the command and control structures of targets and monitoring actually prevent excellence, they don't foster it.

Others also noted the centralising tendencies within their institutions that sometimes could be seen to hinder what they hoped could be achieved:

[regarding plagiarism] they don't trust the administration to back the department if we did take it forward. They said there had been a number of cases where the department had referred the student to the committee which is run by the central university and the committee has not backed the department so they've got this double issue of why should we bother and you just end up with this unsatisfactory and unjust outcome.

Added to concerns over centralised systems, some institutions, often for historic reasons, arrange their disciplinary tribes (Becher and Trowler, 2001) in particular ways that have important ramifications for new academics:

I find the position I'm in really difficult being part of [one department] and yet I'm not allowed to be part of the [other department's] things... I don't really understand how it works anyway and then I got this letter saying I wasn't being put forward [for the RAE]... that's just silly because I mean there are publications.

Disciplines mutate, turning their concerns and methods to different approaches over time, but this is not always recognised in institutional arrangements. Employing a new research-active member of staff who does not fit the research profile of the department can marginalise an individual whose access to support and a research community is hampered by how the institution draws disciplinary boundaries. Disciplinary silos can prove difficult to negotiate, but many institutions manage this issue by encouraging (and not appearing to explicitly hinder) boundary-crossing. Especially where an institution's practices diverge from official rhetoric, this can lead to frustration:

> *And the ridiculous thing about all this is that the institutional processes that produce all this official material are caught up in this whole kind of language and ideology really that disavows the existence of this kind of reality because it doesn't fit the political agendas of the institution and the people within it... it's not permissible to say the reality is if you know the right person you can get this done very quickly. It's not permissible to write that down because officially that doesn't happen.*

The frustration increases where institutional rhetoric is mediated by senior management to run counter to desired developments. This respondent spoke at some length about his Dean's career strategy of moving from university to university to climb the career ladder, making no substantive changes along the way:

> *It doesn't help the people who have five or ten year goals for their institution because they're managed by people who have two year goals and will not entertain anything that takes longer than that... so they're unwilling to make long term investments in anything and the people that are trying to make those long term investments are disenfranchised, unable to get the management support they need or get management positions...*

Whilst the benefit (to senior management) of not undertaking significant change is recognised, if unwelcome strategy, other probationers were less sure of the reasons that lay behind certain institutional practices. Such practices appear as local difficulties that must be adhered to:

> *You're not sure why you're doing it but it's also embedded in a wider culture that I think, you know, that kind of monitoring, league tables, ticking boxes, testing and it's had a fairly baleful effect throughout the whole public sector...*

Where the hours allocated to different activities seem difficult to fathom, and may be regarded as unreasonable, in one institution, what seems to be a very arbitrary institutional process causes resentment:

> *Some people get put on three years' probation like me, some get put on two years and some people get put on one, some people don't get put on it at all so, and it can be, anecdotally within the university, other lecturers will say it can be quite an arbitrary thing. It could be the Dean or HR saying he doesn't need to, we want him more than her so we'll take them off, that kind of thing.*

How these decisions are made may have a reasonable basis, taking all the information available to the institution into account. The reasons, however, do not seem transparent. The apparent arbitrariness is difficult for probationary academics to accept, and this can be compounded, for some, by the very mixed messages institutions espouse:

> *I think that's something you would, politically, to me it's not completely clear at university level what it's all about or whose direction they try to get people to go, whether they want to have great teachers or whether they only want great researchers or if they want both, I don't know, it immediately gives mixed messages I think because of all that and it's ever so confusing.*

The confusion over what is valued can be a source of stress for probationers, who are understandably focused on doing the 'right things' in their new role. Where the 'right thing' remains opaque is most clearly illustrated by the following respondent, who is unique in this sample as being the only probationer I spoke to who was in his fourth year, having had his probation extended for unsatisfactory research performance:

> *When we had the first meeting with [the DVC] about the fact that our probation was being extended the first thing he said to me was, that's a waste of your time. You're not doing that. You're a probationary*

lecturer in a clinical-based subject, what are you doing researching education? We're educating students, how do we know we're doing it well if we're not looking at it?... And then I had a meeting with [the dean] and he reiterated that he thought it was a waste of time.

The institutional vision, and its practices, have clearly been so opaque that this probationer has pursued a course of action for three years with no indication that certain priorities will be valued more than others. He was not alone, with two other colleagues in his department facing the same difficulties, and this shows how changing institutional missions takes longer to put into practice at departmental level. The department, however, is the primary focus for probationers and the place from which they are most likely to adopt their direction.

Experiences of departmental culture

Just as with their experiences of institutional cultures, there are uncertainties for probationary academics of the processes of decision-making in their home departments:

I think it's not very transparent, I don't know much about the department I have to say, I don't really know how decisions are made but I also don't know who to talk to about that... other lecturers who have just started or have been here a year or two, they don't seem to have much insight on all of this either you know.

This is not to suggest that decision-making processes are unfair, but there is a feeling that they are not well communicated to new lecturers. This can be true of even the simplest expectations:

And I think it was particularly difficult that no-one sat me down at the beginning to say these are the rules of the department and I was always feeling one step behind... things like, they don't mark across the grade range here...

This lack of communication can extend to a degree of unhappiness regarding how a department allocates one of its most important responsibilities, teaching, and a particular way of presenting this allocation as a fait accompli:

> *A few weeks before the semester started we had our teaching allocation and the person who does it has a certain style, not to everyone's taste, but it's basically a presentation of, this is what you're doing and that's about the end of the negotiations. So by the time you're shown it's already at the end of the process, not at the beginning. And I looked at this and I could see problems because some of the things I haven't really, I'm never required to even look back at them since I learnt them myself as an undergraduate.*

In this instance, a very new lecturer has been allocated uncomfortable teaching duties, and feels positioned by a more senior member of staff; it is an allocation that does not appear to be open for negotiation. Another probationer also expressed unhappiness about being positioned by departmental priorities:

> *Teaching here in this department is no reward, it's just taken for granted... but the aim is money, right, give me the money [banging fist on table] only the money... but is it the major or the primary target... he didn't exactly say that [probation is conditional on bringing in money] but he mentioned it so what does it mean, what's the message, what is asked of me?*

Departments clearly have varying levels of accommodation for their new lecturers. Sometimes, the welcome is warm, but sometimes it is difficult to decode leading to a good deal of stress as probationers try to make sense of their new situation:

> *[The management team] some of them came straight, more or less, from university straight back into working in the university and have been institutionalised... But we all sort of talk about the fact that the place isn't managed, it's just crisis managed, fire fighting one disaster*

to the next... It doesn't have a proper agenda and they change their mind all the time about what they're doing. And unfortunately I can't see that changing to be honest.

A negative view of management can be exacerbated when probationers join departments that are undergoing curricular changes (Trowler, 1998) and find the atmosphere less than supportive:

And the school consists largely of quite long term members of staff, a lot of kind of very bedded-in people that have seen it all before and have no questions about anything and are massively cynical [laughs], and a few new members of staff that don't get on with the older members of staff and are not given any support, in fact they're resented in some ways because there have been redundancies.

Difficulties associated with perceived lack of support manifest themselves in blunt behaviour that sends a very unwelcoming signal:

this guy turned round to me, I've been here 14 months, and asked me who I was and you just like, you're head of research in the department, I'd spoken to him numerous times on the phone and yet he didn't have a clue who I was.

On a related note, there can also be perceptions of clique-ishness surrounding the new department, and a worry about treading carefully in order not to make enemies. This was particularly apparent from a business school academic who had taken her first post in the department in which she had done her PhD:

I just thought it was more of a question of asking my supervisor because he's in the department so I should ask him instead of approaching other people first because you never know how cliquish [it is] between everyone, you don't want to do anything behind someone else's back...

The perception of a clique in positions of power is not unique to those who have the difficult transition to make from PhD student to lecturer. It can also be an issue for mid-career professionals who have joined a volatile department where power is shifting and more senior colleagues can be seen to be defending particular positions:

> *I don't like the well, politics I suppose and the department's got a lot. Well not a lot, but there are certain people within the department that are a bit awkward and stubborn and worse. The whole time I've been here, the management team's changed completely... so there has been ongoing chaos from when I started and that makes things interesting... I feel I've joined at a time where it's probably at its most unstable.*

Being exposed to such politics may be a useful introduction to the '*underlying game'* (Perkins, 2006) but it highlights an issue that surprised some probationers: their departments' lack of focus on the students:

> *There's also the least resistance idea about you only make senior lecturer or professor if you have your publications and research sorted and I guess there are reasons for why certain people are there and others are really not. Some get lost on the teaching track as they call it.*

Some are surprised by this lack of focus, and also have to deal with difficult issues such as unsupportive colleagues or the allocation of teaching duties that they know are going to prove testing. Uppermost in many respondents' minds, however, was poor communication, and the time required to deal with particular tasks implicit in practices that were never explained:

> *The other thing I'm finding difficult with the department is there's this assumption that you know everything... If I ask a question there's no like she's never done this before, I'll explain it to her. It's just, I'll answer that one question so I end up having to go back to these*

> *people and saying well what about this and this. And then you feel like I'm being a real arse because I'm bugging people.*

Many departments do not appear to focus on the needs of their new lecturers. Probationers can feel excluded from practices and information, and find it difficult to know who to approach to rectify problems. They can feel positioned by departmental hierarchies, undertake duties they feel have been allocated undemocratically and feel that little has been done to support them as assumptions have been made about their knowledge of departmental systems. One potential antidote to these difficult situations is the probationers' willingness to turn to, or further develop, relationships outwith their employing departments.

The role of networks and communities

Some probationers are better placed to make use of established networks that have been achieved in international PhD and post-doctoral settings, and this can enthuse them in otherwise challenging local circumstances, allowing them a feeling of getting things done:

> *The real key thing was doing it collaboratively, the [project] was with three other people across the university, also the special issue... it was with somebody [abroad]... it's a much better way of setting yourself targets and goals if you've got somebody else saying shall we do that by next Friday... I think to have done that myself, well, I wouldn't have got it done... I think that academia is better if you make those connections.*

Not all new academics have this traditional academic induction. One respondent had worked for a government service, and done her PhD part-time whilst working full-time. She took up her first academic post directly following this employment, which had not allowed her the opportunity to undertake any 'traditional' academic networking. Institutionally, she was employed by one department whilst teaching on courses 'owned' by another department, and felt this had hindered her in

establishing productive networks. By her final interview, however, she had made a breakthrough in this respect, and was pleased by this achievement:

> *The annoying thing is when you're here, when you learn about things, there are these brilliant networks and brilliant facilities and brilliant groups of people who are there to support you.*

The benefits of having a supportive community seems paramount to some probationers, especially where this will provide a level of trust and interaction that has not been experienced within the new department:

> *One good thing is that we've got a new member of staff coming in April who's my old PhD supervisor and he's brilliant and I know with him I'll be able to get back to that bouncing ideas and really developing some stuff rather than feeling hindered by it.*

For one scientist, building her own local community of practice is the goal:

> *I guess the way around it is to get lots of money to do research and set up my own team and once I've people around me who I can talk to and bounce ideas with, then things would change. It's just at the moment, that struggling starting out point of not having anything and not being able to ask anyone for anything, it's difficult.*

For an engineer, his focus is on being able to break in to various existing communities:

> *I know that there's collaborative research going on and I know that my line manager has been reminded that it's her duty to sort of, we're better working as a team, selling ourselves as a team, but the research portfolio here is so diverse that it does feel like you're working more independently... I was going up to see someone yesterday at a different university purely because he did some [research]. I found it much easier to talk to him and how he found*

obtaining research funding, easier than say talking to someone down the corridor...

Coming from an industrial research background, he has little awareness of funding mechanisms. He is passionate about his research, and recognises the benefits of collaboration but no-one in his department shares his interests. He finds approaching others daunting, and regrets the absence of a local community:

And I found myself in a catch 22, without any research to generate information, I've got nothing to take to a conference to speak to people who then would like to do research.

A social scientist has similar worries about getting her research reputation established:

I have no network whatsoever. I really don't know many people outside this department and this is something that is bad because I know other people collaborate with all sorts of universities, you get your name well known all over the place and you are asked again and again to take part in projects and I am totally not there yet, you know, so that's something that worries me as well, how do you get contacts?

Developing research networks is a pressing issue for many new academics who appreciate that getting their research profile established is key to their future success. However, it is a time-consuming activity that requires a good deal of confidence, and an issue that presents further obstacles for international colleagues who become aware of their potential cultural disadvantage:

I'm a new guy to the UK and I don't have any network and I have submitted a few proposals but of course they have all been rejected because academically I don't know the culture because I come from a place that has a different set of rules to get it right. I haven't had

that education but the pressure from the top, keep asking, more research income and little help from the top...

The ‘of course’ in the above extract is particularly sad in the context of the increasing internationalisation of British higher education. It suggests that not only do institutions need to pay further attention to supporting the development of productive communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) to support all new lecturers, but that particular attention might need to be paid to intercultural issues to give international staff an equal chance of success during their highly-scrutinised probationary periods.

The structural dimension: institutional requirements

Probation

One institution appeared to transmit very clear information about what was required from academics on probation:

But that work plan as well, by the end of the three years, you must have one successful funding proposal and you must have a certain number of publications and you must do a funding proposal every year...

This extract pays no attention to the mandatory IPD, and raises issues over a realistic workload for those on probation. In the (admittedly unlikely) event that all three proposals – one per year – were successful, someone achieving confirmation could be expected to be working on three separate research projects, undertaking a professional qualification, teaching and assuming a respectable administrative load. This extract demonstrates the profound sense of stress that some probationers feel, but one not necessarily replicated in every institution. Another new academic is clear that there is only one particular demand attached to her probationary status:

I mean it's not a condition of my employment that I get research. It's a condition of my employment that I get a PGCert. So I think the fact that I have a PhD student and that I'm a supervisor and I'm published then that, maybe that's it.

This certainty regarding probationary conditions is inadvertently undermined by discussions with colleagues:

The workload is ridiculous compared to different departments from what I've heard. I mean I was told that when we had that staff review and I think I'm down as 96 hours teaching plus these 10 dissertations that I supervised plus six Masters students last year... I was told it was a small teaching load and yet when I talk to my [other department] friends they told me that probationary lecturers are capped at 20 hours teaching and that's so they can do their research.

Such conversations raise questions about how probation actually operates, and where a new lecturer's attention should lie. This situation is exacerbated for some, where institutional requirements are less clear:

I think the expectation on new lecturers to know what's going on is a bit high... I appreciate there are three strands to being an academic, the research, the teaching, the administration, but in no way, shape or form has there been any sort of introduction to what's expected of us.

Inexact information, rather than unwillingness, feeds into a sense of uncertainty as to how probationary academics will be judged. This liminal space (Meyer and Land, 2005) is most obvious when it manifests itself in unhelpful speculation as to what the institution requires, however willing an individual is to actually meet these goals:

I'm fully aware of how the university perceives new academics, well not fully aware, only the people who have been here before are fully aware, I have my own interpretations of how the university perceives

> *new academics and I'll do my best to fit in with that... all we've done is sort of sit down and write down when we would like to have put a proposal in, a PhD student being supervised... such an amount of other activities going on which is fine, that's post-probation period. I'm happy enough to work within that.*

Where it is difficult to ascertain what is actually required, there is also a sense of a lack of feedback on performance to date. For many who join the academy, and not just those in the dissonant stance towards probation, this lack of feedback, or checks in the system, comes as a surprise and makes it difficult to gauge their progress:

> *The only check that I can see is the fact that they look at the end of the year, which is after probation, and say, well, how many research students has this particular academic member of staff got? Two, three, tick the boxes, right continue on your merry way.*

For others, departmental environments undermine the institutional ones, and probationers are left confused as to which demands they should focus on:

> *It just seems that at least within our department they go, we don't really care whether you get [the PGCert] or not. Personnel cares because they can tick the box that says yes, you passed your probation but on the other hand we as a department say you are not going to get through your probation if you don't do your research and publish. So what's the deal? I don't know, do you?*

If there is confusion over which demands take precedence, there can also sometimes be a growing realisation that the stakes are high, and being on probation can begin to feel quite threatening:

> *One of the main things here I guess, when I started, I had a 3 year probationary period and personnel said that was only because I had to do [the PGCert] and they said it would take really long to do it*

actually, but in fact I'm through, I've done it, I've done all the courses and now I handed my last assignment in last week... so I thought maybe I got over probation you know [laughs] but that's not the only thing, you have to show you're good at teaching, are good at research and publishing the results. Erm, they make it sound now that probation is dependent on the publications that I get out over the next two years.

The notion of discipline, in its punitive, rather than academic guise, can begin to surface for some, as Davies and Petersen (2005) suggest, where probationers feel subject to surveillance, rather than supportive mechanisms:

I think the single most difficult thing I've encountered is the actual probationary process and the kind of attitude I felt the professional development centre have had... the tension between them being supportive and them being quite disciplinary and quite threatening...

This situation can be compounded where institutions do not have suitably coherent practices – especially for those on one-year probationary terms – to communicate effectively with their new lecturers, who appear sometimes to be left in limbo regarding their continuing employment:

I suppose I have [finished probation]. But I have no idea because my line manager doesn't line manage me in any way. In particular he's not undertaken the performance review correctly which has prevented us from having any kind of recognition for the efforts we're making... So I guess I'm at the end of probation. I don't know.

For those subject to more scrutiny via annual review where a three-year term applies, these practices can also be similarly problematic:

I only found out I had to do an annual review from a mailing list email that went around. I've never had to do one, I don't know how to fill it in, I'm not sure, I don't know anything about it. And yet, I've got my

annual review next week and there's just this kind of assumption that I know what to do.

How to claim satisfactory progress is obviously a concern for this scientist, and avenues of support do not appear to be available. There is little sense yet that Clegg's (2008) notion of *'principled personal autonomy'* and that the difficult emotions that can accompany liminal spaces (Meyer and Land, 2005) remain close to the identity-building project (Lawler, 2008) of new academics. These difficult feelings can best be illustrated by an extended extract from the unique case of the clinically-based academic who had his probation extended and talks with great equanimity of the range of issues he faced and how the lack of departmental and institutional guidance impacted on his situation:

I got involved in teaching [a multidisciplinary collaborative course with another institution] where they all get together in their first year, spending every Friday afternoon working in small groups... So I wasn't involved in teaching it in the first year, but I was in the second and the third year, and I was meant to be doing it again this year and then that changed when the crap hit the fan with my probation being extended. They said, right, we'll not make you teach that this year. The big issue has come from we got to the end of our three year probation and been told I hadn't done enough on research and that I needed to get it sorted. They told us that in August and we need to have the paperwork this February, so we've got less than six months to get it sorted, which is now why I've been pulled out of some of the teaching commitments that I had this semester. But it predominantly came down to, well, we'll load the probationers up with lots of teaching because they're not going to say no.

When we had the paperwork this year for probation, that was the first time we'd seen the guidelines for probationers. We'd never been shown that... The first two years we'd never had a review... and the paperwork was quite explicit that probationers are not to be loaded with too much teaching... and it wasn't till the third year that got the

big long letter saying you've not done enough research... The job that I came on board to do has changed. The goalposts have moved in terms of what's expected of probationers, the management team has changed and it's all conspired to land me in hot water.

Unfortunately, this academic did not provide a third and final interview as the timing coincided with him taking paternity leave. He has left academic life, but his reasons for doing so are not clear. It is possible that he chose to pursue a career elsewhere or that probation, having been extended to the maximum, remained unconfirmed. Other issues, related to personal circumstances, may also have played a role, or there may be another explanation entirely. What is clear is that he felt he had complied with every institutional and departmental demand, and still fell short of what was required to be confirmed in post. His is a potentially uncommon experience, although it is hard to be sure as there is no definitive source of official statistics that shows how many probationary academics remain in post beyond the APP.

Initial professional development

Where those in the resonant stance towards probation were likely to criticise specific aspects of the PGCert they had to undertake to satisfy probation, those in the dissonance category pointed to more intangible aspects of IPD as troublesome to them. Initially, attitudes towards undertaking such provision during the APP are explored below, showing individuals' attitudes towards this demand play a role in how the PGCerts are experienced:

It's not like all of us are sitting in these modules because we want to. We're not. We're sitting there because we have to and I feel like we're doing a favour to the university and these people could have met us halfway at least.

Far from personal professional development, this respondent sees the PGCert as simply an institutional mechanism that she is complying with. There is no sense

than anything useful can be learned, and it seems clear that those who teach on the PGCert are marginalised and perhaps should see their roles as smoothing the way for new academics who engage in more important activities. This view is reinforced by a social scientist who found the institutional IPD something of a challenge:

> *I think that my response [to the PGCert] as well is a sort of ideological response as well because I see it as a sort of a part of the neoliberal agenda in higher education, it's part of that turning students into consumers and turning us into deliverers… we were constructed as passive victims [of the professional development agenda].*

Rather than reject out of hand the potential usefulness of provision, his concern is with how the PGCert is presented within the institutional context, and how little attention is paid to his other duties:

> *One week I'd had three in one week [professional development workshops], you can imagine, that's nine hours of inane guff and there wasn't a question session because I've noticed with them, they structure them that you're quite limited in the autonomy you have about questioning and putting in your own needs... you can't do that, you have to respond to their agenda.*

Rather than embrace contestability, it seems that he is interpreting the PGCert as a way that the institution is seeking to influence his practice that allows very little space for reflection. He rapidly connects this to a broader neo-liberal discourse that is widespread within policies pertaining to UK higher education:

> *Yeah, but it's from the same philosophy of the monitoring of the rest of the public services as the probation scheme here, it's surveillance, it's in a sense a deprofessionalising of the professionals and it's just such a bloody waste of time.*

He is not alone in experiencing this difficulty, which jars with his academic background in politics where he has been trained to question any idea that impacts on his freedom to act as he chooses. Another probationary lecturer in this section of the sample also has similar difficulties, not necessarily rooted in the design of the course. Many PGCerts will 'buddy' up colleagues from cognate disciplines to work on assignments or for peer review purposes, and their influence is not always benign:

> *Actually I was quite annoyed on that course because the person that I got put with is a kind of, not a friend but he's someone that I know because he's from [one of my departments] and he started at the same time as me. But his attitude to it was so negative and yeah some of it is dull and some of it pointless to us because we're scientists but you've got to do it so why be that negative about it?*

Although this scientist had heard '*horror stories'* about the PGCert, she was at least prepared to give it a go, and her annoyance at a colleague who had refused to be so open is clear. The potential for some probationers to be influenced by others' attitudes is rarely considered in formal evaluations (Bamber, 2009; Donnelly, 2006) but this is an issue that may have a role to play in terms of evaluating how a course is structured, delivered or received.

It is the case, that some will use the opportunity provided by IPD to reflect seriously on their roles and duties, and come to the conclusion that their own particular position is justified. This can be seen in the following comment, where a particular view is put forward that indicates an increasing sense of agency in their roles:

> *...although in a way I've got a hassle with the probation people trying to dictate what I'm doing, in another way I have got agency, I can choose to do that but not this, I just have to be careful what I'm telling them I'm doing.*

Those who provide IPD (Gosling, 2010) have a wide range of orientations towards their practice (Land, 2004) and it is clear that some of them favour a domesticating

agenda (Land, 2004). Where this agenda comes face to face with negative attitudes towards professional development, the experience may be unfavourable but more positive experiences are also in evidence. For the clinical specialist in particular, the PGCert has opened up a potential research horizon:

> *And I was being encouraged to, I had done my PGCert and I was being encouraged to, well, why don't you carry on and get your diploma? I'm quite happy to keep taking the modules because there's still a few of them that I haven't done that look interesting. And this is the head of department who's telling me to do this. She was very keen for someone in the department to do more education research and to go into that area and I was quite happy to do it because it interests me.*

Another probationer, an international academic, found one particular element of his PGCert invaluable in orientating him to the Western values he was now expected to embrace in his teaching:

> *[The PGCert] it isn't a direct, you should do this or do that, not that kind of formula, but it inspires me to think more... [referring to his roots in Eastern traditions] the way of teaching is kind of from teacher to student but I don't know what's an open question before, now I know an open question can really inspire or engage the students to think more rather than go from point to point question and answer... you can think deeper and get more thinking, lots of new ideas.*

As UK higher education continues to recruit globally, it is likely that IPD will remain a space in which to air inter-cultural issues and to gain an appreciation of the expectations of the British educational environment. Where there is space for this kind of dialogue, it can be liberating rather than imperialistic (Lee, forthcoming). If the engineer reported above benefited from the PGCert intention to give space and importance to discussing issues of concern, the scientist reported earlier as being dismayed at her colleague's negative attitude had, by the end of the year, managed also to retain her enthusiasm for what the PGCert was trying to achieve:

What I've enjoyed the most and what I think has taught me new things has been all of the teaching courses which I've had to go on... doing the PGCert which I know lots of people moan about but doing the course for that... Having to do them and especially the teaching ones and these are better ways to teach, all of that, that's been really useful to me because that's the stuff that the department will never teach me.

Having expressed her dissatisfaction at her department's attitude towards students, there is a sense of legitimation when PGCert staff recognised and reinforced the idea that teaching is important. Closely related to this kind of legitimation is the notion that peer observation of teaching can play a useful role in probationers' development as teachers, especially where the department is not proactive in using this approach as a way of enhancing the probationary experience:

I think the best thing was I actually, the first time I met my mentor, when I was eventually assigned one, we agreed to peer review one of his lectures... basically it was good to see what was being talked about in the PGCert put into practice and I applied the same sort of thinking to my lecture and I found it went very well.

There remains a worry that non-specialists retain a final judgmental role in teaching performance, and how this kind of approach does not pay attention to disciplinary conventions (Rowland, 2000). In some institutions, this role can be undertaken formatively within departments, but summatively falls to central units. The benefit of disciplinary nuance is clear:

This year it's a colleague in the department and it's formative rather than summative [peer observation of teaching] so they will fill out the form without giving a grade. In the third year they will come from the professional development centre and they will give a grade and it must be satisfactory... a peer thing can be quite useful but again you really need someone who can talk through what you want to do and I

don't think it should be some final judgement on one seminar because you never know.

How IPD is organised has an effect on how it is perceived by probationary lecturers and may well be influenced beyond the course team. Often overlooked by conventional evaluations, it may not be wise to underestimate how this level of peer influence (Knight, Tait and Yorke, 2006; Trowler and Cooper, 2002) comes to the fore when probationers are asked for their opinions of this kind of induction activity. Similarly, fruitful discussions are encouraged by multi-disciplinary PGCerts, and often highlighted as one of their most useful features. These kinds of conversations can also, however, raise issues that question how equitably new academics across an institution are being treated:

I've been on the courses that were run here [the PGCert], people say they have really heavy teaching this semester and get loads. They say I'm teaching four hours a week and I'm like what? I'm doing nine till five on Monday, Tuesday, and two till five on Friday in front of the students, with the students.

This participant was not alone in mentioning the disparity in contact hours that had become apparent through conversations on a PGCert. Whilst disciplines traditionally have different patterns of student contact, for probationers, these differences – and their implications for satisfying probationary requirements – are far less clear. If the processes of teaching allocation are felt to be problematic, both at departmental level (noted above) and institutionally, new academics may look to the PGCert to offer some support to make the amount of teaching they are doing more manageable.

In some instances, practices modelled on the course are a further source of frustration:

The one thing I could take away from that programme is that it's almost like a text book study of here are all the things you should not do when running a class... here's how not to design a slide, how not

to deliver a lecture, how not to manage a discussion and so on. It's terrible. We're getting these lectures once a month for four hours about educational theory that's not speaking to our day-to-day nightmare. And I think there's a lot of more down to earth things that could be discussed at these sessions and shared and that would be really useful. But that doesn't really happen at all.

The lack of practical strategies for dealing with day to day challenges appear to be absent from many PGCerts, and sometimes those who deliver what are perceived to be overly-theoretical courses are critiqued for less than exemplary practice. A potential solution to this issue is the departmentally-based mentor that, in policy terms at least, is a commonly reported feature of probation. The effectiveness of mentoring as a solution to other problems is explored in the following section.

Formal mentoring

Virtually every probationer in this study had at least one mentor allocated to them. In practice, however, the role that mentors play and how effective they are appears to be widely variable:

When I hear stories of other people's mentors and you know, the different ways even [this department] works, it's a lot different to the way the [research] centre works and, I don't know, I just think it's a difficult place to be a probationary lecturer. You have to do it for yourself.

This view demonstrates benign neglect by a mentor, but sometimes the mentoring relationship is used as an inappropriate delegation tool:

It's my mentor, well I'm meant to have two. I'm meant to have one in [department] but he's incredibly busy and because I'm left out of all that stuff I don't want to go and, he never comes to me... My mentor upstairs, he's the head of section so I see him quite regularly but not about anything that's going on with me. It's normally for him to

delegate something else to me because he doesn't want to do it normally. I have great respect for the man but he's definitely one of those people who is here to further himself.

Some institutions make efforts to assign mentors on the basis of shared research interests, but this does not necessarily make the relationship any more effective, especially where the mentor appears not to take the role seriously:

One of the negative things... it's my probation mentor who's a professor in the department, and in theory we've got lots of shared research interests but it's interesting in practice we've never actually had a conversation about our research and she just doesn't seem interested... I think the low point was from my peer review of teaching... one of the lecturers in the department had written a report, said lots of nice things... I go in and she hadn't read it, that was the purpose of the meeting... so she looks at it and then says did you write this and I thought well, and I just looked at her and said no and I was thinking why would she even think I would write my own fraudulent review... she said I should have chosen someone who's a senior lecturer and I just looked at her and thought he's actually the director of undergraduate teaching, he's known as being a good lecturer, and I just looked at her and thought what is your issue?

Perceptions of poor mentoring relationships are not helpful in establishing any level of trust, to a point where many actively turn away from the official mentor and seek advice elsewhere. Even if a relationship is workable, the content of discussions can raise issues that are uncomfortable for new lecturers:

My probationary mentor said to me at the beginning of term I love my job but I hate the students and she laughed about it and then she said oh, but I shouldn't say this to you because you're just starting out, laugh, laugh...

Some mentors are skilled in striking a balance with their mentees, and communicate expectations clearly:

> *I have a mentor who's excellent and both my mentor and head of department have been quite protective. I mean they know the ropes, they know how the system works, and they know how difficult it can be at the beginning, I'm very thankful to them for trying to watch out for me... basically they've been very realistic in their expectations of what I need to do, very fair.*

For those in the dissonant category, however, positive mentoring was rarely reported, and this process often appears to be another way in which probationers in this section of the sample feel positioned by external influences.

Other academic expectations – teaching

If mentoring can give rise to difficult situations, aspects of teaching give very positive rewards to probationers. Tutorial settings provided the most rewarding experience and valuable feedback from some respondents:

> *I think talking to the students, not in the lecture... I am a personal tutor of first and second year, that kind of conversation between us and the students, I really like that and the students can give you that satisfaction... they can give you feedback, it's a two way conversation, that's the thing I enjoy most.*

Small-group teaching is preferred, in general, to large lectures, because of the value put on the increased interaction with the students, although the lack of similar academic passion for the subject among students that Haggis (2003) notes can cause some frustration for new academics. The perceived instrumentalism of some students may frustrate, but departmental responses to rising student numbers and research workload issues can be disappointing to probationers as it changes the nature of their relationships with students:

We've got a lot of students with a relatively small department so we've got rid of all our seminars and tutorials and we just give lectures so my second year course, I turn up, give a lecture, I don't see them again, nobody sees them about it and they do an exam, they don't even do an essay and that bothers me for all sorts of reasons and it also removes an element of the teaching that can be quite fulfilling.

Losing valued contact hours in a very satisfying form of teaching can be seen as a negative, leaving a workload balanced in favour of lecturing and concerns about the students' learning experience. In contrast, rather than damage perceptions of teaching, the additional workload that goes with module co-ordination, which is often seen as a burden, can be a very positive move for new academics with new ideas imported from recent industrial experience:

I got module leader for that which was great because I really want to lead it from the front and I'd got great visions for what we should be doing with it.

One probationer in particular struggled with structuring his working practices, and felt the greatest reward in the teaching role was that it gave him a way of prioritising his time effectively:

I like having the teaching workload in some respects because at least a good chunk of your workload has specific deadlines with it.

For this respondent, the autonomy associated with an academic role presented problems, as he felt he responded better to a more structured environment. Another academic, who had never worked in anything but a higher education setting, found the demands of her teaching responsibilities to be less empowering:

I mean I feel that it's kind of really infringing on my independence on what I want to teach and my creativity. I feel very limited by these

kinds of things and I absolutely hate it... my only hope is just if I get my own research money I'll be able to buy some time and the first thing I'll ditch is going to be this distance learning stuff.

She felt very little control, due to the nature of the distance learning programme, where assignments could be submitted at various points in the year, and that the marking burden took away a good deal of time that she could have used to focus on developing her preferred face-to-face teaching. A related issue in a perception of lack of autonomy is where probationers 'inherit' courses soon after taking up post:

And also getting lecture material together because what I'm finding difficult now, I'm taking over from someone else so I've sort of used their stuff as the basis of what I want to talk about, whereas actually it would probably have been easier to go, right what do I want to talk about, instead I've been given, right, you must talk about these things. But I'm learning that now that I'm doing the lectures, is I'm starting to think how could I do this differently and trying to make it into my own stuff.

Some probationers may feel a need to follow an existing 'script' for teaching, and then find it difficult to take ownership of a course. This respondent was not alone in suggesting that he found it difficult to follow a pattern set by someone else, and that the initial experience of doing so has led to the conclusion that he can exercise a greater degree of autonomy. Another new lecturer is also trying to assert her authority over the design of teaching in her department:

There was no tutorials on the list so for next year I've actually put a few, or I want to do a few... [the final year class] it's quite small anyway and actually only about 12 of them turn up to the lectures so when it's that much you can just talk to them. But a lot of them have said how they've not had tutorials. It amazes me how they don't have tutorials and they don't talk to each other because they're not used to that kind of interaction.

She begins by suggesting that she will determine that this additional tutorial teaching will be included the following year, but rapidly pulls back from this position by suggesting it is desirable, a recognition that the allocation of workload may not be completely within her control. The allocation of teaching duties is a concern for probationers both in amount:

> *When I was first handed my teaching load in the beginning of the autumn semester I was given quite a high teaching load and my immediate person who employed me... said 'This is much more.' I was expecting less, she was expecting less, so we got that rearranged, that was reduced, but still a lot higher than what both of us had expected...*

and also in nature. As Huston (2009) points out, it is increasingly common for academics to teach subjects that are not in their area of specialism:

> *I'm very concerned that next semester I've got to teach a subject that I'm not very familiar with... I want to be in a position where I know the subjects I'm teaching. That's an aspiration. Know in depth what I've been asked to teach. It's difficult because the teaching workload is changing, for new lecturers it changes quite dramatically from year to year.*

Even where the subject material is not perceived to be too remote, confidence in their grasp of the topic is not necessarily considered sufficient to teach it, meaning an investment in time to get up to speed:

> *I've been given a fairly appropriate module to lead which is brand new and so there's no prior material and I've had to develop this module over Christmas and start delivering it and continue developing as I go. And write the assignment and now write the exam which I'm doing at the moment. I kind of relished that opportunity but I've found it enormously stressful and I've been given basically no guidance whatsoever. Just, here's a module, there you*

go... So I had to spend Christmas basically studying and then got to, basically teaching was almost starting and I was just sort of getting my own grasp of the subject and needed to start delivering but hadn't prepared any teaching programme. So it's been sort of living from hand to mouth, trying to prepare sessions week to week, in between teaching.

Such difficulties can add to anxieties:

I'm at the point where I could afford a day, maximum, to write a lecture. If I encountered some difficulty in writing that lecture, like I really did not understand some theory and I could not come up with a reasonable explanation for the students, there was no contingency time for me to handle these problems.

... but now I'm thinking because it's the start of term about the teaching because at the moment to prepare a one hour lecture takes me two or three days basically... it is very scary, I'd never thought beforehand and I am teaching a core class in 3rd year and I have got 250 students looking at me and it's quite a scary experience [laughs] and I mean I just started four weeks ago and I'm pretty nervous about it at the moment.

These concerns recede over time:

When I started this time last year I was so nervous about the teaching, all I was doing was sitting here looking at teaching, thinking teaching 24/7 and now I'm thinking, now the teaching seems to have, it's not centre stage anymore, but that's a perception because it is, there's no let up in the amount of teaching time.

Whilst teaching anxieties do recede, issues still arise relating to this aspect of the role that probationers feel less prepared to deal with, and it seems that departments

do not always provide guidance, meaning that new lecturers are left to produce solutions to pressing issues without any recourse to established policies or practice:

> *[referring to press reports of grade inflation] she's in tears because she's failed a course... and the father comes in and he was kind of, he seemed quite a pushy father and obviously the student had come to see me before saying she can't cope and I'd given her all the stuff about the counselling centre... I had a feeling that she just didn't do any of that, so I spoke to him and I hope I said all the right things... later that evening I thought well, I've just passed someone, an international student who should have failed, and I suppose it's commonplace, and it's interesting to read these things in the press as though they're news items and we just do it all the time.*

Of great interest to many, but not all, of the probationers in this study was the nature of feedback on their teaching, possibly because institutional support mechanisms seem weak and they are left feeling unsupported. One respondent in particular appears to be avoiding the institutional process of gaining feedback on his earliest teaching. He indicated that module evaluation forms were administered electronically, but had failed to direct his students to them:

> *I've done the lecture notes and everything like that, and personally the outcome I'm more than happy with. But there's no one checking up on the quality of the lecture notes. I assume the student survey sort of feeds back some snippets of information about delivery...*

Another is frustrated by the lack of systematic approaches to gathering feedback:

> *So the feedback forms which come to us don't include those courses because they're [another department's] courses. I did a [personal] questionnaire for the semester one stuff and I did get really good feedback on it which is nice because at least you're getting someone saying yeah you're good at this... I'm probably not being told*

something about feedback forms and I'm just supposed to know that there's a way of getting it put on the system.

Whether systematic forms of feedback were available, or encouraged, or not, these probationers displayed a good deal of reflection on their experiences and appear keen to learn from them. One in particular, had concerns over depressed exam marks compared to his colleagues, and felt this was an opportunity to reflect on how he had structured his teaching:

> *I've got a lot of pause for thought in the exam that I wrote and marked because the students did very badly on this exam, even some of our best students didn't do very well... So I think that's really causing me to think about the relationship between my theoretical material that was presented in lectures and how that relates to the practical work and I think the two were not very well connected last year... The biggest problem I felt is the lack of group work, although this is indirectly related to the exam, but I think the lack of group work contributes to that because the students are not sharing their understanding.*

Another probationer appears to be interested in the value of her teaching, and whether attendance correlates with exam success:

> *But I think I'll learn new things every year. Like I've started this semester doing a list of attendance. So I get them to sign in if they're there and that means I can track who's not coming to any of them because I wasn't really noticing before and there are people who come to some and not others but there are some that, there's one girl who I swear I've never seen before and she came to see me just before Christmas and I thought, who are you?*

She continues her reflection on the role and process of assessment:

> *Most people I speak to hate marking but I quite like seeing how people are different in the way they come across the questions... because I wrote the questions and I know what I taught them I kind of assumed that they would know what they were going to put and yet some of them came out with the strangest things, I was like where did that come from? So yeah, it was interesting.*

There is a desire to learn something from her students' exam performance, to feed in to her teaching practice, and she is not alone in having the concern that personal effectiveness can be judged by student performance:

> *Every lecture at the moment is different for me but sometimes I come out and think it actually went all right, you know, I felt relatively confident, I had the feeling that I had some control over what was happening... that I wasn't only focused on myself but had some space to look around... I mean I don't know how it's going to develop and maybe next semester they all fail and I was rubbish but I hope they don't fail but that someone will tell me how to do it.*

The pressures on teaching, and on how to judge one's effectiveness at this new activity, is an area that probationers struggle with, especially where they lack appropriate mentors. New lecturers in the dissonant category appear to value small-group teaching above other forms, but get disheartened when this approach is withdrawn, although they can also be surprised at their students' perceived lack of motivation in this respect. Just as with some of their experiences of departmental cultures, they feel they are operating in a feedback vacuum and look to other mechanisms for affirmation.

Where teaching is a new activity, and causes a good deal of anxiety, many probationers are conversant with the demands of research, and feel this may be a less troublesome aspect of their roles. It is to research performance that I turn in the next section.

Other academic expectations – research

Not all of the participants in this section of the study had already completed (post-) doctoral research. For those who had some research experience, the performance expectation was sometimes uncomfortable:

> *I've only done one conference so far with my PhD research... I didn't particularly enjoy the presentation, it all seemed very competitive, everyone totally keen all the time, what are you up to, are you better than me, what sort of grants do you have, why don't I have that you know, all that sort of stuff.*

The level of competitiveness and pro-activity required in STEM areas in particular was something of a culture shock, particularly for this respondent who had come to academic life after 10 years in industrial research and found himself perplexed by research funding mechanisms:

> *Research wise, I'm now trying to get research underway. I must admit, as I delve deeper then it becomes apparent how difficult it is. And I'm becoming more upfront and more willing to try different approaches whereas I'm still cautious but not as cautious as I was before. I know it's a sort of marketing approach... ask people to pay you to do something, which is a very strange concept.*

Another scientific probationer had been left in no doubt as to what her department's expectations would be:

> *I guess the other thing is trying to get money in, so that's this big, there was a definite sort of, it was told to me in no uncertain terms that I have to try and get money in.*

The culture of a research imperative was evident in a number of the departments probationers had joined, and this accorded with why some respondents in this category had taken up an academic post, even if in interview they had, perhaps

unwittingly, concerned themselves with the teaching aspects of their roles. They appear to be in little doubt, however, what 'counts' in the local context:

> *I mean, nothing feels like work unless you're doing research here in this institution, by work, I mean research, that's the only work that counts.*

They occasionally expressed surprise about the rewards of teaching, but clearly had a strong focus towards undertaking research, even if they did not yet fully understand how judgements are made about research performance. For those who took part in the first phase of this study, the spectre of the RAE was at the forefront of their thinking, even if they were not yet sure how this process functioned:

> *I mean we got an email once with a link to the web site [for the RAE] and then I got an email from the head of research here in the department saying that I am a new researcher and therefore they expect me to get I think one publication out next year.*

The importance of the RAE is not a significant factor in the thinking of one probationer (who has since left British HE), and neither had it been made clear to her:

> *I didn't know what it meant, that was the thing. I don't understand really, I mean no-one again, they don't go round telling you what the RAE's about and this is why you should be included... I have no idea basically so she just came and I thought it was relatively usual that you are not included... I asked whether it's important I am included... but then she said oh well, at annual review we talk about this as well and then obviously we have to look at your probation again, I thought the probationary period would be over if I have [the PGCert] because that's what personnel told me. Now I wasn't aware that maybe a certain number of publications is attached to that [laughs].*

This shows that over time, departmental and institutional priorities are becoming clearer, and that the requirements of an academic post consist of many more demands than the letter of appointment suggests. It appears that the notion of regular, external research assessment is experienced as somewhat threatening for some new academics who had not been prepared for the significance of this kind of review. The cyclical nature of research assessment, and its effects, are better appreciated by some probationers, however:

> *[The RAE] that's had a terrible impact on higher education and for me as well as a new academic who's coming in before that... I've got more than two things, I did have the four published and they initially wanted to put me up for four things and I thought, well, there's a group of experienced academics, 10, 20 years and they're putting up four things and OK I've got four but I felt a bit uncomfortable being judged in that way... so I've been put in for two, but it's gone to the [name of] panel which, I don't do that and the chair of the panel is a professor here so you know, to me the whole process is just farcical.*

Again, there is a sense of being positioned, rather than exercising autonomy, in the whole RAE process. Similarly, there is frustration that a good deal of work goes in to becoming research active when taking up a first academic post, and that this may not necessarily be well recognised within institutional systems of accountability:

> *I haven't, in terms of research, I've done lots of stuff but very little of it has really worked out just yet. I put in for a [funding proposal] and that was rejected but they were very, the comments were quite positive... and my book project is still kind of up in the air [laughs].*

For others, especially those recently from commercial or industrial backgrounds, the potential for research activity is a strong pull, but the difficulty in starting up independently is, perhaps, not yet fully appreciated:

> *Seeing my name on the spine of a book is a dream of mine that precedes HE but it's more possible that might happen now that I'm in*

this environment because I can take the time to do that and say it's part of my job. I can speak and publish and try and pursue my own sense of where we should be going in theory or in practice within my subject area with much more freedom than I could in a corporate environment. That's really what I want to do but at the moment I sort of feel like how am I ever going to get to that because I can barely cope with the day-to-day and this dream of exploring these lofty ambitions seems very distant.

Related to actively pursuing research, as the above respondent notes as an aspiration for the future, is the imperative to publish, and several probationers in this section of the sample were aware of this demand as a fundamental aspect of their current roles.

The goal of publication

Some respondents had clear ideas about how to progress their work, even if, in practice, it was proving a difficult task:

It's definitely challenging in terms of publishing and I've not been able to do it so far but I am being quite ambitious and hopefully this last paper's going to get somewhere.

The strategies for publication employed by those in the dissonant stance towards probation seem more focused than their counterparts detailed in Chapter 4, in that quality seems to take precedence over quantity, and that this guides their publication decisions:

I want to get the publications in the right journals, I want people to respect me and there is that vain side I think where I want that, that name, but it's not overwhelming.

Probationers in this category are not always clear that performance in the publication arena will have an impact on their careers. The implications of not publishing are not necessarily well understood:

> *Everyone is in the same boat in the sense that no one understands what the implications are of us not being able to publish and maybe there are none, maybe it's just not written anywhere and we've started wondering. But it is creating a sort of yeah, fear is too much you know, but uncertainty I think because it's unspoken and everyone has their own assumptions of what it might mean. So there you are, everyone's dreading this annual review now which is next week.*

Once again, there is an issue of feeling positioned by local cultures, with this particular probationer unable to source any local support to deal with the issues that are raised with regard to research and publication. This uncertainty is exacerbated for some probationary academics by the kinds of demands that are publicly espoused, leading to a lack of encouragement to pursue a publication agenda, rather than maximising the time available to achieve what may be seen as unreasonable targets:

> *That's really another issue these days because we should only target the really good journals like 4* journals which no one has ever published in here, not even some of the professors let's say and he [the Dean] says he's not interested in anything less than 3* publications so you know, there you go, now I'm sitting wondering how to do it and there's no real support or guidance in this either you know, because no one has real experience.*

It seems reasonable to suggest that many probationers feel they have to achieve a certain profile of publications quickly – ie: within their probationary period – that were not expectations of those who currently sit in judgement on them.

Other academic expectations – administration

The focus on research and publication at institutional and departmental level are perceived to be important messages, and where time is finite and often controlled by the need to organise and undertake teaching, it is not surprising that the administrative aspect of the probationer's role is seen as something of a distraction. The new academic who had his probation extended had become more focused and realised that some duties he carried out in the service of his community of practice (Wenger, 1998) were no longer sustainable:

> *One of the things I was doing before [probation was extended] was I was on a couple of committees for our professional association, which took a fair amount of time and my head of department said don't leave, just say you're withdrawing for a period of time... I went okay, I have no intention whatsoever of going back because I can't commit time for that...*

For another, local priorities had an impact on what she chose to focus on, at the expense of students receiving timely feedback:

> *That's why my marking's not being done because it's just very low on my priority. I mean the postgrad office can say whatever they want but the Dean isn't going to promote me or evaluate me on the basis of how well I do my marking. It's going to be the research.*

The growing realisation that different activities carry different weight sends very clear signals to probationers about how they should be spending their time, and this seems to exclude a good deal of 'service' activity (Macfarlane, 2007) that rapidly becomes less of a priority:

> *I think one thing that's changed is a growing acceptance that there are always a large number of things that ought to have been done yesterday, that a number of people are shouting at you by email about and that's quite normal and not something to be hugely*

> *concerned about. And I hope I keep that sense and that it's not just a product of being more relaxed in the summer and that I'll lose that sense when term comes back and panic again.*

Being on top of the administrative workload, where once seen as a vital part of performing the role of professional academic, is soon relegated to an activity that follows the line of least resistance, suggesting that administrative requirements need rather less contemplation than other forms of academic activity:

> *Yeah, but now I realise that the majority of my colleagues at the meeting will not have read any of these documents so there's not actually much point in me reading them... because we'll have to start from scratch in the meeting anyway. So it becomes a lot easier to deal with these meetings because you realise that all you need to do is turn up and bring your brain!*

This can lead to a situation where probationary academics reproduce prevailing cultures (Archer, 1996) and thus quickly dismiss any potential for change as new staff recognise the value accorded to specific activities:

> *I underestimated the time and complexity taken in doing back office management type things that we all have to do at every level. The administration functions of the academics are staggeringly time consuming... the amount of time left to do anything of real value is incredibly small.*

One administrative responsibility that can rarely be avoided by any academic, whether or not it is perceived to carry any value, is the exam board. Probationers can be unsure of their role in the exam board process, but the opportunity for external feedback can give them a better sense of their department's processes:

> *It was anonymised [exam board] but the head of undergraduate courses went through every grade and there was a sense of it being a bit random, like what was my role in this as he read out the grades*

but he was explaining why they'd change the boundaries and stuff... and the externals were both really impressed with how we ran things... just having two external views saying this is really good does change the way you think to a certain degree...

Another respondent, however, felt that her department's process left something to be desired. She spoke at length about two incidents where she felt the exam board was not fulfilling its obligations. Initially, she was angered by the board's focus on academic results, ignoring the integral role of one student's placement to overall degree performance:

There was one last year that I got outraged at... there was a girl on the Masters course... she went off to do a placement and I was her placement supervisor. And it came back they, they sent a letter within the first month to say this girl was taking the piss basically... she just wasn't turning up for work and she wasn't getting in touch to say that she wasn't turning up and she wasn't doing any of the work... and so I had to go up there and speak to her and make sure. I mean they put down all of these absences and it was awful, it was horrendous. They called her unemployable and the project that she'd been doing, people had been having to do the work for her because they needed that work done. So all of this goes on and on. And at the exam board she tops the class academically. So she's very clever. And they want to give her the class prize for the year. The class prize and she spent three months on this placement where they've called her unemployable and I was just like, I was absolutely furious. I said I cannot believe that it's not been taken into account... they turned round and said oh well, we thought that you might have an issue with this. It's like so you thought I'd have an issue with this but you decide to wait until the exam board rather than tell me beforehand that this is what's going to happen.

Having recently sat through the undergraduate exam board, she, like others, felt that institutional and departmental processes were either not well drawn, or not well applied, where there were suspicions of cheating:

> *There's this one girl in the final year who, she just asked me for a reference... She plagiarised her thesis, she was accused of cheating in one of the exams by a few students, she failed my exam and she came out with a third. And she's asked me for a reference for my old work place which I think is quite funny.*

On probing how the student was awarded her degree when she had plagiarised her major project, the department's administrative procedures appear to be lacking:

> *It was the draft and I noticed it. Her, I was the second supervisor and I noticed it. Her first supervisor had signed it off saying yes, this is absolutely fine, make a few changes. I said the entire thing, not just bits of it, the entire thing was taken paragraphs from books and web sources. Now she was told to go and re-write it and the other lecturer was the marker and I told him that it was plagiarised. And he said that he had put some of it through a programme, I actually don't believe him. I think he lied to my face. And he gave her 62% for it... I mean she would not have got 62% if I'd been marking it. But that's, she got through because it was just the draft and the second copy, from what I can tell because I do believe the guy lied to me, I don't think was checked.*
>
> *But cheating, she actually cheated in the exam and there's nothing they can do about it because... It wasn't that a member of staff didn't see her, two members of staff would have have had to have seen her cheating in this exam in order for anything to be done about it. And because it was another student who said that she'd seen her, the department couldn't back up the other student and if it went to Senate they would make this student stand there as her own witness, not supported by the department to say this girl had been cheating. I*

> *mean come on! The girl cheated. She pulled a piece of paper out of her pocket and also she asked to go to the toilet in that exam and the woman who took her out was going to take her to one set of toilets, this girl said no, I want to go to the other one and she let her go to the other set of toilets. I mean, you wonder. Things like that are an absolute joke.*

This new academic's perception is that due process is unfit for purpose and she was angry about how instances of students' poor behaviour were dealt with. Part of her anger stemmed from a sense of powerlessness when confronted with what appeared to be a fait accompli regarding the awarding of the class prize. It is this sense of being positioned by departmental and institutional rules and processes, of being made to feel complicit in what she regarded as poor practice, that affects her – and others' – sense of agency, and how these probationers came to be included in the dissonant category.

The agentic dimension

Participants in this section of the sample reported more stressful situations and felt less in control of their time and duties than those in the resonant stance. Common preambles to responses to many of the interview prompts were long pauses, or an initial *'I don't know...'* before these new academics volunteered a substantive response. If self-efficacy (Dweck, 2000) is the marker of those in the resonant stance towards probation, those in the dissonant stance displayed a good deal of oscillation between feeling autonomous and feeling constrained.

Agency constrained

The notion of the psychological contract (Tytherleigh *et al.,* 2005) plays a role in the APP, and respondents suggested that the 'deal' was not what they thought it would be:

I came in thinking I had a permanent job, I actually don't until the three years are up and they've made that very clear. It was made much more traumatic in a way because of this professional development and the amount of time and the way it made me feel, quite unstable in terms of having thought I had this job to thinking if I don't do want they want I could be sacked.

I've gone through incredible phases, I mean it really did make me question being here... I felt I'd been duped... but then I thought no, calm down and some of my friends were saying look, just calm down, what's at the root of all this, is it just the probationary thing?

The language in use – *'traumatic', 'duped'* – is strong, and perhaps deliberately so to convey the sense that the demands of an academic role were not what they were expecting. For one with work experience outside of higher education, a contrast between the working environments is relevant, and perhaps touches on his difficulties:

I've had that side of a different working environment and it's definitely fed into how I respond to academia because when I see things that are unprofessional or arbitrary, I have this horror of it... I have a sense of having sacrificed things for it, I sacrificed a salary for all those years, and then to have a sense of what it could be like if I'd made different decisions.

He brings a strong sense of a particular set of values to higher education, and feels that some practices he encountered in his department do not support this view. A similar disparity between expectation and practice can lead to a lack of commitment to the employing institution:

I want to do what I want to do and to some degree at my own pace and see what comes of it and there are times that I have a fear that I will be stuck here... The probation process is looking at me to meet

plans and keep me working for them but if anything I'll just keep working to be employable somewhere else [laughs].

This sense of disappointment can change over time, as probationers adapt to their circumstances. Even where there is a growing acceptance of the nature of the working environment, how things are actually done is still experienced very personally:

I'm less inclined to expect everything to work as it's supposed to... I have much more awareness of that kind of thing... That doesn't mean that I'm perhaps more in agreement with these things or compliant, no, not necessarily, but I am less shocked. I'm expecting these kinds of frustrations so I'm less hurt by things. But I still disagree with the way a lot of things work.

Sometimes, however, even the passage of time does not resolve the difficulty of the feedback vacuum noted above:

I'm not one of these people who need someone to constantly say oh you're doing a good job, but there is nothing, I mean absolutely nothing. No one ever says about anything that I'm doing, that I'm doing it well because I just, I don't have that. I find that really hard sometimes, it's a very lonely existence when you're not getting any positive feedback.

For this scientist, and the engineer quoted below, there is a constant sense of worry that their efforts may not be recognised, and that they may be judged by more instrumental measures that do not reflect how hard they have been trying:

And the concern I have is the fact that, at the end of the day, if it's not successful [grant proposal] and another year goes by, how do new academics get judged knowing full well I'm putting a lot of effort into this? And there's no one, in my last industry there were timesheets so basically any project bidding work was signed off by the business

development manager... if it was unsuccessful the activity was recorded... but there is that concern that at the end of the day, how do people recognise what you've actually done?

The lack of clarity surrounding probationary standards of performance can lead to considerable stress. One engineer, who did not wish to be recorded, spoke about physical symptoms associated with stress – chest pains that he thought might be indicative of a heart attack. Another respondent maintained that she had developed good coping strategies: *'I don't do stress'*. Others, however, felt that they were in stressful situations. Two specifically used the term '*firefighting'*:

I think it's pretty challenging I have to say, I am sort of in a continuous state and have been for quite a while, of feeling like I'm not really doing my job essentially. The teaching gets done, the admin gets done, all of these things are more or less okay although I almost feel like I'm firefighting on that front. The research is massively stalling so I feel like I cannot allocate enough time, just free time, when I am not distracted, not disturbed, just to get into the work and I have been to counselling sessions about that.
I have completely lost all sense of perspective in the last five, six weeks and have got to a point where I'm just barely surviving and firefighting constantly from day to day... I'm barely making any of my commitments... working 60 hours plus a week.

The day-to-day working environment in a shared office could be a source of difficulty, but the obvious solution of avoiding the office did not prove helpful:

The office was really dysfunctional and a bit difficult to work in... so I took to working around campus by laptop on the wifi or working at home, but that had its own dangers because then I was left alone with my anxieties and could spiral, being very unproductive really and getting more and more wound up about everything.

An office move was arranged following this probationer's annual review which demonstrates the department's willingness to act once aware of a problem. It may also highlight, however, how long new academics cope with difficult situations because they are not sure of the 'correct' channels to pursue to address any issues that they may have. This is not to suggest that they are unwilling to take responsibility for addressing how they feel. Some new academics are only too aware that they are working under a good deal of stress, and have their own role to play in dealing with it:

> *I can't retain this level of being totally concerned about it [teaching] you know, being worried about it, that's what I am at the moment because I just feel so exposed every second of every day where there are all these people so I have to change, my attitude or whatever has to change...*

The sources of stress are multiple: departmental practices; office environments; concerns about teaching well; and also the students themselves, as this international academic found out at the end of the year:

> *I think at the start I had a quite positive attitude towards students, I thought it would be good if everyone would enjoy what we're doing here... since I got the teaching evaluation questionnaires back with very nasty comments from students and also taught on courses that have major issues, people complained a lot this year, the total course was very confrontational... I have to say I have become a bit fed up with them... I'm not really above the issue yet, so obviously yes, I do take personal offence, but at the same time it is reassuring that they also complain about other things but also other colleagues so that is quite good but still, reading that about yourself is harsh.*

Her difficulties with student feedback (which, immaturely, made negative reference to her nationality) plays a role in her feeling constrained in her future practice. Her initial commitment has been corroded, and she feels a reasonable response is to comply with minimum expectations, eschewing any level of challenge in

undergraduate teaching. For others, however, their demotivation sprang from the attitudes of colleagues:

> *So talking to [colleagues] doesn't fill you with wisdom and inspiration. It just kind of brings you down [laughs] and makes you think, you know, does surviving mean becoming like them?*

Whereas those in the resonant stance towards probation articulated their satisfaction with their 'friendly' departments, for those in the dissonant stance, the perception largely was that their departments suffered from a lack of friendliness or collegiality:

> *I can come in here in the morning and not see anyone unless I go upstairs and make a coffee, I just won't see anyone. And sometimes I feel guilty because I think I wonder if they think I'm not here and no-one ever checks on me or anything... it's just totally different so everything seems a bit strange.*

For one probationer, who was appointed in one department but taught exclusively on courses that came under the purview of another, the contrast in experiences was very obvious:

> *I have new lecturer friends [in both departments]; they seem to have this support structure. They have proper mentors and they have proper research departments and people know who they are and all of this, and I just seem to be on the sidelines going well, where do I fit. I don't really fit.*

The lack of collegiality and support appear evident in the attitudes of others, and there are concerns that success in academic life may mean compromising existing ideals that are held dear:

> *Coming from a company where I didn't think I was a team worker because I'm very good at telling people what to do. But coming from*

that to nothing, being on my own, and then trying to bounce ideas off people and then people nick your ideas. And you just go, hang on, and you become very, right, so this is my stuff and it's awful, it's a really horrible way of being... it makes me think that I won't spend my life in academia because I can't bear to turn out like some of the academics here. If that happens to me, I just couldn't bear it. And I don't want to be like that. And it also seems that people's main thing isn't the students, it's themselves and that gets to me... It wouldn't surprise me if, in 10 years time, I'm not in academia any more. But we'll see.

For some, however, there is welcome a level of collegiality within their departments, and a growing sense that they can play a useful role in departmental activity:

And lots of things that we were sort of collectively saying we should do and, of course, none of it was really happening... and I was thinking what's happening? And then it suddenly hit me that there's no answer to this question... this was a really important moment for me, you know, it suddenly dawned on me that all I needed to do was tell people what was happening, not ask them... it's that realisation that I can take responsibility, I can do this, and nobody's going to tell you off. Or well sometimes probably they might, but it's too late then.

The potential to exercise agency has developed across a year – the above quote is from a final interview – and it clearly can be a transformative moment. For one probationer, there is still an acknowledgement that an element of conformity may be required:

Maybe I'm being more bolshie now and I say, well I don't believe this is the most efficient way to do stuff, not being argumentative and saying you've got to change... they don't employ people in our academic staff here to sort of sit down and be passive. They can see problems and they should be feeding that up, as well as being told what to do...

The requirement to conform, however, was most keenly felt when additional duties needed to be re-assigned, and how powerless probationers feel in relation to acquiring more work is clear:

> *This semester I was asked to take on an extra module... but I was only informed about this sometime during the summer and essentially it was nobody's fault because one of the lecturers simply decided to leave the university and somebody had to take over. So I'm not saying that this is unfair in any way but this is supposed to be my research semester and it turned into this other nightmare for almost over half of the semester...*

> *So we were making up for them [other departments not sending facilitators]. And then another thing, we'll stop it and we'll do a semester each. Can't do that, we need continuity. Every other discipline did that. I've seen that... I believe the reason she's saying we can't do it is because she can tell me to do it. She won't go and ask one of the more senior members of staff who may be a bit of a cantankerous old git and will just tell her to get stuffed.*

The role of senior colleagues, as delegators, adds to established feelings of constraint. There is a degree of acceptance that it is not possible to refuse additional duties, and that the willingness of probationers to demonstrate their commitment to their new roles can, sometimes, be exploited. This resentment can be exacerbated when the attitudes and practices of more senior colleagues are perceived as poor by probationers.

The role of professionally-significant others

If more senior colleagues have the potential to act as good role models for probationary lecturers, it seems they often do not take this opportunity. Some can display behaviour that is considered as infantile:

I thought the way in which the lecturers were asked, or informed, that they hadn't done what they were supposed to do was a bit child/parent type thing, well, why haven't you done this. And that's only one instance. I appreciate how much pressure they're under to get these things in and most lecturers I spoke to about it when I was pretty annoyed, said it's water off a duck's back to them.

Others recognise game-playing that served the agenda of senior colleagues whilst paying no attention to the probationer's needs:

The stressful bit is the same as the stressful bits always are, it's just down to other people but I'm getting used to it I suppose as time goes on. It's the politics, so I just remind myself I'm a probationary lecturer [laughs] because no one else seems to remember that half the time.

The self-serving nature of some colleagues is also recognisable:

But when you work with people who are like that, just complete snakes, then you don't want to work with them. There's no point... Be very careful what you say to certain people and not just trust everyone is out for good because they don't seem to be in this place.

This can lead to the development of a level of mis-trust that is not seen as especially helpful behaviour in a mentor:

I think it's a very particular type in academia, the very self-centred person um, and someone who's not generous enough to really share their knowledge and ability or their praise or their time. I think I've gone from, I'd love her to read my stuff and give me comments to think, well, do I actually want her to look at it you know, what is her motive and how will she use anything I tell her in the future. It's not a bad idea to have those things on your mind because there are

> *people who are untrustworthy and do use information in a way that's not honourable and they do seek to have power in ways that are exploitative of other people rather than helpful.*

If mentors can display behaviour that clashes with the existing values that a new lecturer brings to their role, other colleagues, even when not in a direct power relationship, can also exhibit problematic behaviour. However irrational such behaviour, it can at least offer an opportunity for the limited exercise of agency that probationers in this category struggle to achieve:

> *...but the problem I had with her, she was a second marker and she disagreed with some of my fails and she came in and was very confrontational and very irrational, saying like you can't expect them to be Einstein and I said I'm not but I am expecting them to read more than one book and it transpires that she has favourites and I think a person that I had failed was one of her personal tutees...*

For some, there are helpful colleagues, but it is noticeable that, for this category of new lecturers, they rarely seem to be other academics:

> *There are helpful people in this department. When it comes to things, there's always the secretary and she's incredibly helpful over things. And actually, the woman who's head of teaching is, most of the time, incredibly helpful... The only people who I really get on with and who I consider people I would turn to are the lab technicians and the secretary. They'd notice if I didn't turn up. I don't think a single academic would notice if I didn't turn up.*

The level of isolation and poor role models that probationers in this category report appears to lead to a determined distancing of themselves from what they see around them. It is not only within their employing departments that these sorts of behaviours are reported; they can seem to pervade institutional practices:

In the workshops you are infantilised and then sometimes you'll know the ones who think similarly so we'll be almost not quite giggling at certain things but there's that kind of dynamic and at the coffee break we'll go out and there'll be small groups of people muttering and saying, don't think much of that.

For the unique case in this section of the sample, of the academic who had his probation extended, and noted above how he felt that his head of department had exploited his vulnerable position as a probationer, the hierarchy of the institution has now become very clear:

I got the impression when it first happened [probation being extended] that they had been hauled over the coals... I came back to the department and had a meeting... where I was expecting to go in and have a fight with them and everything I said, they said, okay, okay, anything else we can get done for you? And it was blatantly obvious that they'd been hauled over the coals... so I'm hoping they realise the sort of seriousness of the situation and that they will continue to respect that we need the time and that will carry on beyond the end of the fourth year in probation.

In his one subsequent interview, he concluded that some, but not all, of his requirements had been honoured, but he continued to privilege his new research role, thus exercising more agency than he had felt able to in his previous three years in academic employment. He did not provide a final interview, as this would have coincided with paternity leave; he is one of four of the 10 probationary academics in this section of the sample who has since left his original institution and, it would appear, academic life.

A concern for work-life balance

Probationary academics in the dissonant category spoke more about difficult situations within the workplace. When asked to say more about any other concerns

they had, they volunteered some, but fewer, concerns about balancing their personal and professional lives. In one instance, this appeared to lead to the exercise of more agency:

> *... having the autonomy to sort of organise how I'll do the work is one of the benefits, so it's a work/life balance where basically I work the hours that are required, and more so, but I can choose when I work those hours so I often find myself, if I want to do something, doing it at home in the evenings. But then again, if I need to pick up my son from school, it doesn't mean that the hours don't get worked.*

For others, there is evidence that they feel more driven by an institutional agenda than their own particular goals:

> *I do want to go somewhere else ultimately, and to live somewhere more fulfilling... that's got a lot to do with life issues but it does, I think, those issues do impact on your academic side, I mean if you were just more stimulated by what's going around you, you do take more interest in your work as well.*

Life gets in the way for one probationer who has struggled to structure his non-contact time, resulting in continuing stress in his second year:

> *So at that time I was very optimistic because I'd finished a term and I'd survived and just that gave me a lot of confidence. And also obviously I was facing increased freedom over the summer to pursue things I would not have been able to pursue during term time. So that was quite an exciting time. However, the summer didn't progress as I might have hoped in that I found it very difficult to know what to do... I didn't really have a plan for the summer and I wasn't effectively making use of that time... and what complicated things was I was getting married at that time so that gave me a massive project to distract me from any kind of preparation for this year.*

Discussion: oscillation

Probationers in the dissonant stance had a wide range of concerns about both their own roles and their new working environments. These have been grouped into three themes regarding the key influences on their probationary period. First, a lack of collegiality in their departments and the related phenomenon of perceived poor role models are explored. Second, issues of stress, uncertainty and destabilisation are examined. Lastly, the role of structural demands, in the shape of probationary practices and IPD are detailed.

In contrast to those in the resonant stance towards probation detailed in Chapter 4, the respondents represented in this section of the sample, whilst aspiring to the kinds of autonomy and self-efficacy (Clegg, 2008; Dweck, 2000) that those in the previous chapter reported, appear to oscillate between feelings of agency and constraint, and experience greater difficulty in decoding the limits and demands of their new roles. The most profound difficulty appears to be related to the nature of the departments that they joined, to which I now turn in the analysis of those in the dissonant stance towards probation.

Role models and their influence

Trowler and Knight (2000) make a strong argument for local induction practices for new academic staff, to counter charges that the professional development on offer to probationers is too generic (Knight, Tait and Yorke, 2006) or may have more strategic or managerialist overtones (Clegg, 2009). There is also a concern that such induction is too focused on a learning and teaching agenda (Ashworth *et al.,* 2004) and does not pay enough attention to the wider demands of academic practice (Brew and Boud, 1996). The position that Trowler and Knight (2000) adopt, where a department is better placed to induct its new recruits, is a seductive one as this approach privileges disciplinary practices (Becher and Trowler, 2001). The evidence in this chapter, however, shows that not all departments may be equally placed to deliver high quality induction experiences due to the presence of

established staff whose own attitudes and practices were called into question by the probationers interviewed.

A significant proportion of probationary academics in this study felt they joined departments where the ethos is far from collegial. Neither managers nor mentors appear to be especially helpful, and the probationary process is either bureaucratic or unfathomable. In this area the departmental locus of learning and development advocated by Trowler and Knight (2000) breaks down; there appears to be no localised community of practice (Wenger, 1998) to join to become sensitised to the role. Those in this category report a sharp sense of isolation, and they witness practices that they view as contrary to the values and beliefs that they bring with them as they enter the academy.

A consequence of this mis-match between probationers and their more established colleagues is evidenced in the view that academic life may not be the long-term career aspiration that the new lecturers had hoped. They appear to have difficulty reconciling their expectations of a strong, disciplinary-orientated learning community engaged in a joint enterprise (Wenger, 1998) with the more individualised, even selfish, practices of their more senior colleagues. Probationers reported issues with the way power is exercised (Davies and Petersen, 2005) which did not seem to be to their benefit and also having to confront troubling attitudes.

Stress, uncertainty and destabilisation

The existence of such troubling attitudes leads to a good deal of stress and uncertainty for probationary academics, which many find deeply unsettling. Whilst one of the new lecturers in this section of the sample referred to stressful moments, she also talked about solid coping strategies; one participant reported physical symptoms related to stress, and another had sought counselling to help her cope with her working conditions. All bar one suggested that the level of stress they felt had, at some point, had an impact on work performance. One new lecturer in particular felt he had been admonished at his exam board for not having had his exam paper ready in time for moderation by the external examiner. This he

attributed to being so stressed about having to compile an exam paper for the first time that he experienced a sense of paralysis, such that he endlessly deferred the task.

As noted above, responses to interview prompts were often prefaced by the phrase '*I don't know...'* Whilst respondents always found ways of responding to questions, usually very productively, and some at great length, their uncertainty regarding the nature and expectations surrounding their roles seemed clear. Departmental and institutional policies and practices seemed very opaque, and it could be argued that the probationary academics in the dissonant stance feel far less able than their counterparts represented in the previous chapter to exercise any form of '*principled personal autonomy'* (Clegg, 2008). They aspire to such autonomy, and a few referred to this notion, but they seem more prone to regard themselves as constantly under the kind of managerialist surveillance (Davies and Petersen, 2005) that precludes them taking the initiative to shape their roles as they would wish.
It is this oscillation – between recognising and aspiring to autonomy, and feeling constrained – that is the key distinguishing feature of this group. Some of things they report having encountered makes them question whether academic life is for them, and indeed a number of the new academics in this category suggest that a career in academia may not now be for them. There are many instances in their interview talk where they do report taking initiative and exercising a positive sense of agency. Equally, however, this is something that appears difficult to sustain, which destabilises new lecturers' sense of themselves.

This analytic category gives many examples of probationers working within the very contradictory positions that Peseta and Grant (2011) write about. For many, these contradictions cause a good deal of stress, and a re-evaluation of career goals. By adopting a longitudinal approach to this study, however, it was possible to see how these issues are experienced over one year of the probationary period. By the final interview of the sequence, many talked of a more accepting attitude towards the difficulties they encountered around them. The destabilisation that they have talked about previously appears to recede, and they take a far more sanguine view of how academic life actually is.

Four of the 10 participants in this category, at the time of writing, were no longer in their original employing institutions, which contrasts with the zero wastage rate for those in the resonant category. For the probationer who had already had his probation extended, that final interview encounter was not possible, and he has since left academic life; the other three remain in academic posts in different institutions. The study design did not allow for any follow up, so it is impossible to determine whether these early experiences played any role in their decisions to move on.

The role and influence of professional development

After the home department, the next venue probationary academics encounter is the teaching and learning centre. All of the new lecturers in this section of the sample were undergoing a PGCert and so were exposed to the practices of other departments through activities undertaken for the course. Rather than act as any kind of reassurance, information exchanged within the PGCert setting, for this group of respondents, frequently seems to lead to further destabilisation. They became aware that other colleagues had, perhaps, far less teaching, or more supportive mentoring arrangements.

Two respondents in this category were scathing about the PGCert and, for them, it became a second source of considerable stress. Rather than complain about any substantive content of the course (as those in the previous category did), it was the values, attitudes and practices of the PGCert that seemed to produce the most negative views. The two most critical participants experienced this particular structural demand as threatening, in the sense that those running the courses were trying to inculcate a particular managerialist agenda. The result of this perception was a gradual withdrawal of engagement from the PGCert, even trying to do this officially rather than surreptitiously.

Others voiced familiar complaints about the PGCert, usually relating to the amount of time it consumed, especially when they would have preferred to be spending time on establishing their research. One criticised a particular module (on e-learning, as

her colleague in the previous chapter did), and one complained that the course did not provide enough help with regards to his teaching. He also commented that he had deferred undertaking a core module relating to teaching, learning and assessment.

Three probationers suggested that their perceptions of the PGCert were initially influenced by '*horror stories'* from more senior colleagues (Comber and Walsh, 2008). They were subsequently pleasantly surprised, with two of them finding their courses useful, with one potentially considering pedagogic research in his discipline as his research goal, until this idea was quashed by senior management. As in the previous category, just one probationer in the dissonant stance offered an epiphany from his PGCert. Coming from an Eastern background, his view of teaching was transformed by a Western concept of higher education as consisting in open questions. He volunteered that this idea had fundamentally changed his tutorial work into a much more rewarding experience.

Summary

The evidence gathered from those in the dissonant stance towards probation gives some cause for concern regarding probationary processes. It can be seen as a troubling time, and in some instances, deeply unpleasant. The ethos in the departments that these probationers have joined tends towards the prescriptive, neo-liberal managerialist (Davies and Petersen, 2005) environment that conflicts with the values that many new lectures bring to their roles. Their departmental 'home' and the attitudes and practices of more established colleagues are a source of considerable stress. In this respect, the respondents assigned to the dissonant stance appear to have much greater difficulty in exercising agency, even though, as with their new colleagues in the previous chapter, they aspire to such and it is one of their reasons for taking up an academic post. As one respondent (who did not wish to be recorded) suggested, academic life gives the *'potential for freedom'*, but that this potential, as he sees it, may never be realised.

One new academic in this section of the sample had recently completed a PhD and taken up her first post in the same department, but still found the transition difficult.

Other respondents had moved institutions, countries, or transferred from industry or commerce; their experiences were troubled by opaque procedures and what were perceived to be unfair demands. Morale (Watson, 2009) is low for an extended period of time for these new lecturers, which leads to serious concerns about a long-term future in academia.

The cynicism of their colleagues towards the need to complete a teaching qualification (Comber and Walsh, 2008) can also prove difficult, but some do find this process useful. Others, however, experience their institutional PGCert as an instantiation of the pervasive surveillance (Davies and Petersen, 2005) that emanates from the senior management of an institution. Inappropriate mentoring can often reinforce this perception, and may even lead to unfortunate kinds of cultural reproduction (Archer, 1995).

Stress, uncertainty over demands and a degree of destabilisation dominate in the narratives from new academics in the dissonant stance. This often appears to preclude the exercise of autonomy that Clegg (2008) suggests is still possible for academics. The challenges for these probationers appear to stem from three key sources: moving internationally to a different national culture; moving from an old, Russell-group type institution to a university with a different ethos; and moving from non-academic settings. The experiences of many in this category do improve over time, and coping strategies are developed to deal with the more difficult situations that arise in the local context. In contrast with those in the resonant category, however, far more participants with dissonant socialisations to the academy move on from their original institutions in a shorter timescale, and this perhaps deserves greater attention.

Chapter 6: Rejection

> *I always had the feeling that the academic world was, um, a little bit indisciplined and a little bit chaotic…I didn't imagine it extended to what I considered to be their proper work, you know the work of teaching and learning and studying and marking exams [laughs]… it's all the way through, it's not just a superficial veneer of amateurishness, it's entirely, yeah.*

The third and final analytic category derived from this study is that of rejection. This category represents a small minority in this study, all of whom had lengthy backgrounds outside of the academy. Whilst it would have been possible to include this small group within the dissonant socialisation stance, there was a quality inherent in the language in use which pointed to their transitions being experienced differently. It could also be argued that outcomes – in terms of academic longevity – were more likely to differ for this group too.

Characteristics and proportion of the sample

It should be noted that this category, comprising just 3 of the 23 participants in this study, is by far the smallest, and thus yielded the least data. Of the three interviewees ascribed to the rejection stance, two were male and one was female, two worked in pre-1992 institutions and one in a post-1992. As noted above, all had long histories outside of academic life and took up their first academic posts as mature candidates. The two male respondents had previously worked exclusively in the commercial world for a number of years; one had spent 10 years running his own company. The female respondent had also spent about 10 years in each of two public service organisations, latterly in a profession allied to health and was in the final year of a three-year probation. Two of the respondents (one male, one female) were working in health related disciplines (although one only tangentially, in health information and promotion); the last was based in a graduate school, and part-time, thus, perhaps, subject to a different range of influences and practices than those participants who were located in mainstream academic schools. None of the three

respondents had a PhD, and two had first degrees in very different fields from which they were now working.

Between them, these three probationary lecturers provided six interviews: three from the probationer in her final year, two from the respondent based in the graduate school (who also provided email answers to interview prompts when he unexpectedly could not make the second meeting) and a single interview from the post-1992 academic. Only one of the three respondents in the rejection category, who were all interviewed in the academic years 2007-08 and 2008-09 was still in post by September 2010.

The cultural dimension: rejection

As in the previous categories, the same prompts were used in interview for the probationary academics who have been assigned to the rejection stance. Their responses, shaped by their experiences of the local culture(s) of institution and department, form the focus of this section of the chapter.

Views of institutional cultures

The academic department is the primary locus of learning for probationary lecturers (see next section). However, new academics do often place themselves and their department(s) in the wider context of the institution, resulting in recognition of congruence or conflict between local practices and institutional norms and conventions. Becher and Trowler (2001) assert that disciplinary allegiances dominate institutional ones, whilst Davies and Petersen (2005) conclude that neo-liberal discourse now so strongly frames academics' experiences, suggesting institutional culture(s) may exert more influence. Those new to the academy with lengthy experience in other economic sectors, can find decoding the culture perplexing:

> *It doesn't help that all words have a different meaning in universities does it?*

This respondent, interviewed in her third and final year of probation, expresses frustration with terminology and with the academic timescales. Two senior, but relatively recently appointed, colleagues were referred to as having *'come from outside'* with the consequence that they didn't *'actually know how this place works'*. Opportunities for IPD and formal mentoring, prescribed through institutional policies, were felt to have been lost in a department seen to be trying to negotiate its place within the wider university.

Another participant in this category was employed in a Graduate School, potentially another example of a cultural system (Archer, 1996) appearing fractured, with the department seemingly not part of mainstream activities. Both the institutional locus of the Graduate School, and the experience of participating in the PGCert, can give a certain kind of grounding in institutional culture:

> *It takes me outside of the department and there's obviously a cross-section of lecturers so it encourages me certainly to think about what other people deliver and the challenges that other academics face and it's also an insight to all the politics and stuff as well because I can hear it from different people's perspectives…*

These other perspectives are not always positive, and often more so in an institution that is positively promoting a need to change:

> *… there's a lot of talk about the role of management, how issues are becoming more pressing and receiving more focus and revenue streams are much higher on the agenda…*

This participant did not feel that staff in universities were particularly adept at dealing with change. He sees how, as the ideas around change circulate, the staff perspective can become negative:

> *I am less sympathetic to the "lecturers' lot" and more positive about the students' attitude… repeated "moaning" has made me more*

determined not to adopt a negative attitude and to remember why I chose to enter the profession

Socio-cultural interaction is problematic too, with new and 'outside' leadership unable to set a coherent direction within a department, and proposed changes leading to negative attitudes. These difficulties form the focus of the following section of this chapter.

Experiences of departmental cultures

The department, as the immediate environment to which new academics are exposed, can be seen as exerting a key influence during the APP. The management practices of a department can therefore signal strongly to new academics what is expected of them, and those in this category had other models of management as comparators:

I think that, if I stepped back and said what characterises the department is that there are very few people in it who seem to know what they're doing [laughs]... and the ones that I think probably do know what they're doing aren't doing anything for the benefit of the department, they're playing the system, feathering their own nests...

I think coming from outside an academic institution, um, it's a very peculiar environment... I'd describe it as silo management...

Evidence from these interviewees indicates an outsider perspective, where departmental cultures can be seen as unsupportive. Two respondents specifically used vocabulary from the neo-liberal discourse that Davies and Petersen (2005) suggest pervades higher education management. Both suggested that students could be perceived as '*customers'* and an academic's role is to provide services to customers and that perhaps, in the words of the third academic in this category, '*from a business, commercial point of view it's not very good. It's totally random...*

Everybody's doing their own thing.' From their perspective, the departmental culture appears '*unprofessional'*, and this may be related to a culture of autonomy:

> *If I was to sum up the induction... my main experience has been of being asked to do too much all at once... you get a mentor... but you're just spending every day ringing that person up who's then off doing 20 other things. It's just not physically possible.*

For the respondent in her third year of probation, this implied criticism was taken further:

> *I've just got the form for my last year of probation, well I say my last, but it might not be of course given the way it goes round here... but I was filling the review form in or something and it says when was your last kind of PDP and I haven't actually had anything, I've got no mentor, the form's got to be signed by a mentor and head of department... nobody's actually guiding me or checking up on me...*

Archer (1995) explains how cultural systems reproduce, and the importance of consensus for socio-cultural integration. Where there is perceived to be a lack of mentoring in place, it is likely that highly individuated practices may predominate. In this respect, the isolation referred to by those in this and the dissonance category is the element of the cultural system reproduced, and successful integration seems less likely to occur where no shared vision of the cultural system is apparent.

One of the respondents in this category worked in a health profession-related department where significant change was being imposed in response to changes in funding. She reported on a '*fractured culture'* where under the new regime, there was little departmental understanding of new directions:

> *... stuff that I'm involved in teaching is being cut, no doubt about it, because of this kind of question as to why do they need to know that, and we've got people working here who it seems have done virtually*

> *nothing in their working lives except teach that and now somebody's decided that it's not needed...*

Added to this form of departmental destabilisation (Trowler, 1998), previous difficulties contributed to further uncertainties, culminating in a more strategic approach to overcoming probation:

> *... two lecturers had their probation extended... I've got a year to go, well, I'll be the next if there is a next I suppose. I don't know, but after my probation report I got a little letter saying your progress is satisfactory but we recommend that you put more time towards research... I don't intend to become another pawn in that particular scrap...*

There was a sense that interaction with a poorly-defined or articulated sense of departmental culture presents challenges to probationary academics. Those subject to the APP may try to exert some influence on a new cultural system:

> *We've had a lot of talk and a lot of meetings and a lot of we must do this and we must do that and nothing much happens very quickly, well usually it doesn't happen at all, sometimes it happens because it's just got to happen because some kind of police will be here [laughs]*

There is frustration at the degree of inertia in the practices and management of departments. For this category, there is evidence of the use of language that is commonly associated with a neoliberal agenda, but unhappiness that departmental cultures do not seem to engage well with the changes implied in such an approach. Critique is levelled not just at strategic actions, but also day to day practices in the department that can make it an unpleasant place to work:

> *I think there are one or two key people in the department who are in positions of authority who don't really see it the same way as the rest*

> *us do and that's not just even in the sense that you know we all want to crack the whip and they want to give them a kind of cuddly time…*

If departmental cultures are experienced as frustrating, not especially collegial, and lacking in strong direction or management, it seems reasonable to suggest that probationary academics in this situation may turn to wider networks and communities to sustain their socialisations. The role of such extra-institutional influences (Crawford, 2010) is the focus of the next section of this chapter.

The role of networks and communities

Beyond institutional and departmental cultures, networks and communities provide a further aspect of enculturation into academic life. One of the three probationers in the rejection category spoke specifically of a network beyond her department, due to its professionally-orientated nature:

> *I was involved in what I might call piddling little research projects and in the world of [research specialism] that's quite normal... So when I walked into the department I had quite a big list of publications with my name on it, um, and people thought I was some kind of super-crazy researcher [laughs]... plus I worked in a particularly good team of people... so when I got into the department, I thought I would be allowed to carry on doing that and I am allowed to do that but I still do it with the people I used to do it with. I don't do it with anyone here...*

It is clear that this respondent feels that the shared goals and repertoires that Wenger (1998) details do not appear immediately available within the institutional context. Later in the academic year, however, the potential for internal collaboration has surfaced, and emerged in response to a prompt regarding the 'best thing' about the year. The potential rewards of this way of working seem clear, but the features of a developing network are not yet fully on display:

> *I can hold my own with it again [research specialism]... I have sort of negotiated the right to creep in there [name of lab] from time to time*

and use it in the hope that no-one is going to come down and say no which I appreciate they always could. But you know, just to go back to doing that and be able to do it bigger and better than I ever did before and you know, think about these things, I have enjoyed that.

After nearly three years in post, there is still no clear trajectory from novice to expert in this particular research community of practice (Jawitz, 2009b); there appears to be no sense of entitlement to access facilities that are necessary to develop the research that the department is privileging.

Another respondent in this category, based in a Graduate School, talked of the necessity of partnership working in research:

The research that goes on is probably related, combined with other schools so we're not doing a great deal of research in terms of what we do, there's research being done but it's probably allied with other departments

As with other central university units, research may tend towards serendipitous or institutionally-focused initiatives. Networks and communities may therefore be shorter-lived and more instrumental than is the case within mainstream academic departments. Drawing on a commercial background, this new academic took a more pragmatic stance towards negotiating his place in a community of practice:

... it's not just about the price or the procedure, how do I work round the procedures... it's a question of well, how can you go round them, and I don't think academics have a great deal of perception, awareness of those things.

The commercial influence is clear in the language employed across this respondent's transcripts, which gives a sense of distancing from the traditional, collegial views of academic practice (Becher and Trowler, 2001):

I started in manufacturing, so over 20 years I've, I know how organisations function... you know, the complexities of them and how politics and power structures work very differently and how power is not always residing in the as it were in the seats it's assumed to be in, for me it's relatively easy for me to come in and say well, yeah, that's the rules but look at what people do, look at how people actually effect change etc and it's interesting that a lot of academics don't appreciate that.

Unlike the first respondent in this section, who is struggling to find an appropriate community, and relying instead mostly on productive relationships with previous colleagues, there is no sense from this new academic of any desire to develop such connections. Despite being appointed part-time as an academic in a Graduate School, academics are 'otherised' (Cousin, 2006) frequently in his interview talk. A second and final interview, when he had become full-time continued to show a more managerial focus:

If I was going to stay in this environment I would want to do that. I would want to give academics a chance to improve their practice and deliver good teaching to students... and touching out to other departments and saying, well, look, you know, we don't have to have this silo mentality. It's not my department against your department in some kind of game battle.

Despite the change of circumstances to full-time employment, the distancing remains, and there is no sense of developing networks. Similarly, the third interviewee in the rejection category had little to say about academic life comprising productive networks. This suggests a conceptualisation of academic life as a very individualised role, but equally may be a function of a short length of service. Both of the men in this category were in their first year of service when initially interviewed; the female respondent, however, was in her third year, and beginning to see the benefit of a community beyond her immediate department. Those coming to academic life from long service elsewhere, clearly demonstrate the time it can take

to negotiate entry into disciplinary communities and share this potential difficulty with international colleagues.

The structural dimension: institutional requirements

As in the preceding chapters, the exploration of structures focuses on what the new academics involved in this study had to say about the APP itself. This is followed by their perceptions of IPD and other academic expectations: teaching, research and administration. Findings are discussed and summarised in relation to those ascribed to the rejection stance, before feeding forward into a comparative discussion in Chapter 7.

Probation

One participant in the rejection category had joined a department where there had been a recent history of difficulties with probationary requirements for colleagues:

> *... the people who are ahead of me, the probationers who've got the problem have just got themselves a mentor obviously as a sort of knee-jerk reaction*

The difficulty for these colleagues had been associated with quite profound changes in the direction and focus of the department (elaborated further in the previous chapter). As a research agenda had become more dominant, some new colleagues found their high teaching loads actively working against them when it came to confirmation. As it remains unusual to encounter such difficulties, it was not clear how this situation might play out, leading to a great deal of uncertainty over requirements:

> *I just feel like going in to somebody's office and saying excuse me, can you tell me whether I'm going to be confirmed in my post or not because there's a job coming up and I want to know whether I should*

apply for it or not you know, you can't carry on with your life under this uncertainty. I mean it's a ridiculously long probation period anyway I think, I've never heard anything like it before...

It was clear that research was going to play a bigger role in the shaping of careers in this department. This message, however, was communicated sporadically, which highlighted a sense of 'moving goalposts':

> *All I had to do a few months ago was to register for a PhD and knuckle down to that... but now what's required is that I've got to get money in and supervise some students and well, you know, when I get some money in and supervise some students what will the next thing be?*

The previous probationary difficulties, however, had led to those staff who had had their probation extended being removed from a good deal of teaching duties and allocated research mentors to improve performance in this area. Together with retirements, a whole host of other teaching and administrative duties needed to be reallocated. Some of these were offered to this probationer:

> *I got a call in the office Friday afternoon, hello, I see you have volunteered for this and that, thanks very much but I was wondering if you'd like, and it was it, the poisoned chalice for me, why me, I'm only on probation [laughs] how can I take on a big responsibility like that?*

Especially in its three-year guise, the APP can induce a long period of uncertainty. It also includes, as this participant found out, the opportunity to take on a growing range of responsibilities. Contemplating these opportunities, however, when one is still uncertain of the future, places pressure onto those who feel they still lack legitimacy.

> *I went for a little chat with our vice-dean, I thought it was a little bit sinister actually [laughs]... I'm waiting for the letter [regarding*

confirmation in post], yeah. Why does it always take so long? You're expecting it 2 or 3 weeks later or something... my recollection is that last year it was something like August that people in this department heard because it was obscene because the people that had their probation extended, 3 or 4 months had gone...

The experiences of other new staff the previous year led to greater pressure to excel in this area. It would seem, however, that senior staff were also new in post, and there appeared to be little direct leadership to pursue this agenda:

I was kicking against this PhD thing... I went to see quite a senior person [in a different faculty] with my list of publications and asked if I could do it [PhD by publication]... I didn't want to commit to some lifetime of focused study but anyway I have now registered to do a PhD and with every intention of doing it [laughs]

The difficulties of staff employed earlier was much talked about amongst the small group of new academics in this department. With new senior management, however, whilst they had clearly come together to form a supportive group, they were unable to figure out satisfactorily how the new requirements would manifest themselves. The cultural elaboration that Archer (1995) suggests plays a key role in understanding and changing systems is not accessible to this probationer and successful role models do not appear to be available.

Whilst the APP was clearly perceived to be a particular issue for the participant whose circumstances have been explored above, the other two interviewees in this category, one subject to one year and other three year, probationary periods, had not perceived quite such difficulties. Indeed, one of them never actually used the word probation himself; his focus, discussed in the following section, was on the IPD provided by his university.

Initial professional development

For those in the rejection stance, two engaged with PGCerts, whilst the third deferred participation. Most of the data in this section, therefore, is drawn from those two sources.

> *Yeah it has been helpful but it's been helpful in a kind of ethereal academic way than in a practical kind of way that we're talking about so yeah, I've learnt about theories of education and actually I found it quite interesting you know... Something which has kind of, well, I'm afraid dismayed and amused me is what students are like with regard to education so I trot over to the [teaching and learning centre] and sit and hear about constructivist education, you know, deep learning and [laughs] and introducing a kind of independence you know, and all what I get is what are the exam questions going to be...*

The common concern of translating 'generic' theory to actual context remains a difficulty. A second issue is that as PGCerts have become more theorised, practical concerns do not seem to be addressed. A second interviewee also noted this lack of practical skills and techniques on offer, in relation to his peers on the course:

> *some of the people have got an incredibly limited amount of experience of talking to groups… and their acquired skills to stand up in front of a group of 100 people and actually say anything is very limited and I don't think the PGCert here addresses that…*

His concern seemed to revolve around a conception of teaching as performance:

> *You are on stage, you have an audience… you've got in effect obligations to the paying public, you know you are an actor and I don't think those acting skills, those practical acting skills have been tackled…*

The third participant in this group worked in a university that emphasised teaching as reflective practice. For this reason, he had deferred participating in the PGCert:

> *I've put it off for a year because I'm being asked to reflect. Most of the teaching courses seem to be about reflective practice and you don't have an opportunity to experience that until you've started the process… I would want to do the course [his new MA] at least once and then start that process… my priority is to get it up to the highest standard possible and run the course.*

Having been employed to develop a new Master's-level qualification, this interviewee had very limited teaching duties. For this reason, he felt that he would not be able to benefit fully from participating in a PGCert that was summatively assessed via reflective portfolio. This had caused some difficulty with the university administration, as technically, participating effectively in the teaching qualification was part of probationary requirements. He successfully argued his case that his current duties placed him in no position to achieve the learning outcomes. Whether the peer and tutor support of the PGCert group would have been useful in other ways – as in getting to grips with institutional culture, for example – cannot be known, as this participant left the university shortly after the first interview had taken place.

He had aspired, it would seem, to undertake the qualification when he had a teaching load that would have given him plenty of opportunities to reflect on and potentially improve his practice. Many other courses also adopt this approach, and many probationers do have a teaching load suitable to enable such reflections:

> *On the PGCert I'm in a cohort of twenty teachers, some of them quite experienced, but without formal qualifications… what I find interesting is that they have got a marvellous opportunity there to reflect on their teaching… and I don't see that. I see them potentially moaning or praising what they see in front of them, but I don't see them reflecting… if they'd really embraced reflective practice rather than keeping a diary of events after they've given a lecture then I think*

their response in that scenario would be very, very different. Similarly, the person at the front who stood up delivering, are they showing elements of reflective practice? Do I see them developing their practice over a course of ten or 12 weeks in response to the audience? No.

Whilst it was a feature of this interviewee's transcripts that criticism appears to be directed at others, he discussed his own teaching at length and was self-critical in that regard. This is elaborated on further in the section below on teaching expectations. Where PGCerts are not perceived to meet the current needs of probationers, there is always the potential for impact:

… one of the people on the PGCert delivering the course actually inspired, has inspired my teaching. Um, and it wasn't about content, it was just about his, the aura that he has… So in many ways, he's made me realise that I've got exactly the same freedom that he's got to throw away the PowerPoint… my practice subsequently has, this term, has changed quite dramatically, um, I'm ready to do a three-hour lecture with two pieces of paper.

This interviewee's experience is a welcome one but, as Clegg (2009) suggests, may run the risk of privileging certain practices and perhaps also undermine those colleagues who do not view teaching as performance (Hockings *et al.,* 2009).

Formal mentoring

From the small number of respondents in this part of the sample, it can be suggested that mid-career professionals find the adjustment to academic life somewhat challenging. They have moved from arenas where they are competent and well-established, into another space that uses different vocabulary, employs what sometimes seems like unfathomable processes, and may offer little in the way of mentoring or support. Many universities have policies regarding mentoring but two of the three respondents did not feel this provision had been made for them. It

had for the post-1992 participant, but he did not necessarily derive great benefit from it:

> *You get appointed a mentor who helps you through. But you're just spending every day ringing that person up who's then off doing 20 other things. It's just not, it's not physically possible.*

Without this form of guidance, frustration can arise from many directions, as probationers lack the vocabulary or any sense of how to tackle new issues.

Other academic expectations – teaching

Two of those in the rejection category had some limited prior experience of teaching before joining their universities and teaching was not, therefore, a completely new experience. The two who had had some exposure were keen, at the outset, to emphasise their enjoyment of this aspect of their activity:

> *I do enjoy teaching when erm my customers, students, are interested and keen but they're not always…*

This enthusiasm can lead to a prioritisation of the teaching role, and the consequent investment of significant amounts of time; and a sense that the role of an academic is teaching-focused. In some cases, this can be sustained over time, as can be seen in the final interview with the participant quoted above:

> *[having taken up a course leadership role since the first interview] I feel that I'm able to make more of a difference to students and provide them with a better quality of care, of provision, should I say… I might think of myself as a very progressive teacher…*

Conversely, students can ultimately be seen to be more challenging, which can have the effect of dampening enthusiasm. From expecting a very teaching-focused role, one participant found herself in a department rapidly prioritising research. It is

possible that this rebalancing of departmental activity has somehow been transmitted to the students who, feeling marginalised, behave less well than they might. This lecturer made a frank admission of how that feels:

> *Erm, I suppose you know, this is a bad thing as well, and a bad thing to admit, but I have become less erm, conscientious about the teaching side of things because it really doesn't seem to matter to anybody apart from me [laughs] and a few of the students but even they… there was the option of doing the same as last time… then I probably sort of didn't bust a gut to do what I might have done when I was in my first year of teaching here. I don't see anybody saying we really want to develop excellence in teaching, I mean they say it but they don't really put their money where their mouth is… having said that, we've had a very bad experience with our current first years… I was brought down by it, yeah, exhausted and just feeling completely worthless and humiliated.*

By now, this respondent had completed all the elements of her PGCert and was simply awaiting the results from the final module, along with a letter hopefully confirming her in post. Until the interview, she made it clear that there were few opportunities for discussing the difficulties in teaching and student behaviour within the department. There is a sense of isolation, leading to some serious self-doubt:

> *I wonder have I really contributed to that bad situation… I never imagined that I would have to deal with these sorts of things and I was seriously thinking that maybe I should ask to be sent off to [school teacher training establishment] where they can teach me how to maintain discipline in a classroom full of adolescents…*

The initial self-doubt is then surpassed by thoughts that the source of the problem may lie elsewhere:

> *We're teaching a whole new programme this year and that is another kind of confounding factor in all of this and I suspect there is*

> *something about that programme that has put them at a greater disadvantage even though they had far fewer exams than they would have had under the previous programme… If I wanted to be conscientious and was really committed to it all I would pursue that thought but it's not worth it, no-one will thank me for it.*

The other respondent, teaching solely at postgraduate level in the Graduate School, is not beset by such worries, but does recognise how his teaching style can have an impact on the satisfaction, and performance, of his students. He contrasts his chosen, 'progressive' style, with his perception of the perceived favoured style of his students:

> *… teaching postgraduates things like philosophy, you know it can almost be a 1960s schoolroom anarchy where we can talk about whatever it is. But is that what the students actually need? You know, some students don't thrive in that…*

Clearly, these probationary lecturers are reflecting seriously on their teaching experiences. But nowhere, where the focus of the discourse is on the teaching aspect of the role, do these participants make any link between teaching performance and probationary expectations. It appears that teaching activity is therefore the least monitored aspect of a new lecturer's role. Not only is there the most cursory monitoring, there is no perception that any attention or value will be placed on this important aspect of their practice. It has long been complained that promotion criteria underplay the importance of teaching (Gibbs, 1995); this simply follows a pattern that may get set at the very beginning of an academic's career.

Other academic expectations – research

The importance of the role of research can be seen to differ across different types of institutions. In the UK context, it can also be seen to exert a cyclical influence with regards to the temporal demands of research assessment. Of the three individuals in the rejection category, only one could be said to have had recent exposure to research and publication:

When I worked in the [name of organisation] I was involved in what I might call piddling little research projects and in the world of [specialism] that's quite normal… when you've got a bit of data you can present it at a conference and publish a paper. So when I walked in to the department I had quite a big list of publications… and people thought I was some kind of super-crazy researcher [laughs] little realising how kind of routine and easy it is to do in that particular environment…

As noted earlier, however, this involvement in research was not seen to fit well with the new and increasing focus, which to departmental management clearly needed to feature elite external funding:

The HoD sent around an email to all of us about new research money from the [funding council] and if you were in your probationary period you could get this money and it's a little bit easier to get... I could probably have a crack at, you know, get some money, get some brownie points

As external funding is a key indicator in research assessment, simply continuing previous patterns of research collaboration appears, for this participant, to be something that will not earn the requisite 'brownie points'. Instead, previous successful behaviour appears to be devalued; external funding and registering for a PhD – moving away from applied areas that had worked in the past to a more narrowly perceived academic form of research is being explicitly encouraged.

The second participant in this category from a pre-1992 institution (which are often assumed to be more research-intensive than other universities) was less specific about any particular research pressures. Not being based in a mainstream academic department may relieve the research pressure; he did, however, draw attention to the potential – and practices of other colleagues – in conducting collaborative research with those in mainstream departments.

The post-1992 interviewee referred, rather than to academic research as commonly understood, to market research. His focus was on ensuring the new Master's degree he was writing was properly tailored to its potential audience, and to distinguishing who and where that potential audience was to be found. He was unsure how committed the university administration was to support him in this goal:

> *I've come here and been told that, you know, we have researched this course, we want to do this course…but there doesn't seem to be a national postgraduate marketing process… there is no central point… so then the pressure is passed back to the lecturers to find a way of doing it… you've got to promote the course before it's written*

Research activity was not on his agenda for the foreseeable future, and neither did there appear to be any management or departmental pressure for this situation to change. In part, that could of course be attributed to the cyclical nature of research assessment, or simply an expectation that developing and running a Master's programme in a fast-moving field would be sufficient activity, leaving too little capacity to participate fully in other aspects of an academic role.

The goal of publication

There is very limited reference to the notions of the '*pecking orders'* or '*elites'* that Becher and Trowler (2001) refer to, suggesting that those with backgrounds outside of the academy have less understanding of how, *'in academic life... nearly everything is graded in more or less subtle ways'* (Becher and Trowler, 2001: 81). The probationary academic with the impressive publication list, the perceived *'super-crazy researcher'* is thus bemused when continuing this research strategy with former colleagues is not appreciated in the disciplinary community:

> *It seems that this is still not good enough, that I'm, this year I've got about 3 papers published and a couple more in the pipeline but I've still got to register for a PhD, they won't accept that to get publications, is not good enough...[and in the second interview] we have meetings where we're told we have to write research grants to*

get money in and I was filling in my little form earlier and I'm not the first order but I've got 4 publications since last year and I thought, well that's not bad, it's more probably than most people in the department and yet somehow that doesn't seem to count for anything you know, the goalposts keep moving...

Apart from this probationer, there was no other mention of publication by those in this small section of the sample. The goal of publication may simply not be a priority for those in the rejection stance.

Other academic expectations – administration

Davies and Petersen (2005), in detailing newer accountability regimes, point out the irony of such accounting and how it detracts in time and energy from the active pursuit of academic work. The UK has also followed a similar path of accountability in academic life that has led to increasing bureaucracy (Head, 2011). For those with long career histories outside of universities, the proliferation but ineffectiveness of the systems of accountability are quite surprising:

Well I think the meetings, 90% of them are a waste of time. I've been to staff meetings where nothing is agreed or discussed… are just badly run events that just have no purpose… I just find it incredible. And how many times does that happen?

This post-1992 participant finds it frustrating that good time can be wasted on achieving apparently very little. He is echoed by another of the new lecturers who is not only frustrated at certain departmental practices, but angrily brandishing a lever-arch file, seems almost insulted:

And this was sent to me on the 17th with an instruction to read this plan for the meeting on the 2nd…Two weeks to absorb all this. No attempt at executive summary, not really even any instructions about what I was reading it for… a ream of paper, double-sided. Now, I

went along to this meeting yesterday, took about six hours… with absolutely no preparation at all, um, I don't know how many other people had read it, but I certainly hadn't. Um, and I'm not sure what we delivered in those things apart from probably eight bullet points… The action list did have names against it, but it didn't have any times.

If meetings were felt to be ineffective, and maybe sometimes surplus to requirements, other forms of communication were also intrusive, time-consuming and distracting:

And emails. The amount of times that somebody will send a group email and then you'll get all the arguments in-between that have got nothing to do with you… that is an eye-opener. People are trying to protect their own backs aren't they. So they want to be seen to have written things.

As far as possible, the final interview of the series was conducted at the end of the academic year, shortly after exam boards would have been convened, in order to capture this experience. For one participant in this category, who was already struggling to gain access to an academic identity that felt remotely comfortable, she found herself confronted yet again with actions that are difficult to fathom:

… we've had a very bad experience with our current first years and the subject I teach which is not solely me because there are 4 or 5 other lecturers who teach it, only 6 out of the 27 passed the exam and er, we had our exam board this morning which was actually not the bloodbath I was expecting …

Being in her final year of probation, she had attended exam boards before. Even so, having to contemplate a 'bloodbath' seems extreme. Her worst fears were not realised, but other behaviour surfaced at the exam board that took a newer colleague by surprise. Realising that such practices were no longer a shock can be a sign of thorough enculturation into the disciplinary tribe; it may signal, however, disenchantment with a growing but reluctant acceptance of departmental culture:

… there was another little thing… it turned out that somebody had found out that she [director of undergraduate studies] had adjusted some of the marks on some of the exam papers… then somebody else piped up and said that 'I found that the mark had been changed and had been put up to 40 so I put it back down again because one of the questions that I'd marked in the first place had been changed and not in a way that I would support…' it turned out that it was known by other people in the room that that had been done to some other students but we weren't sure who they were or whether that was justified… so that aspect of the exam board was kind of put on hold and we've got to have another one next week [laughs]

Yeah, well, and there was somebody who at the end, a few of us stayed in the room and had a bit of a bitch [laughs] and she said I'm outraged by this and said oh you haven't been to one of these before and she said no, so I said well I've got used to it now, but that's pretty awful isn't it?

From this example, it seems that some aspects of university administration are open to questionable practices, and it is not clear what probationary academics can do about practices that make them uncomfortable. When those in authority can act seemingly in disregard of regulations, a newcomer's sense of values may be undermined where practices that can outrage are tolerated.

The agentic dimension

The small number of probationary academics in the rejection stance towards probation had the least positive things to say about their new working environments. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the language in use by this small number of respondents differed from those ascribed to the other categories, and whereas the majority of those with resonant and dissonant probationary experiences remained in post, two of the three in this section of the sample left academic life after a relatively short period. In the previous two categories,

characterised by self-efficacy and oscillation, the distinguishing feature of the rejection category is the extent to which respondents' sense of identity remained couched in the practices and dispositions of their previous roles. This I have called 'prior identity maintenance'.

The cultural system (Archer, 1996) of academia appears alien, from the meaning of every word to confronting the 'moaning' of more established colleagues. Initially, therefore, I explore how the new lecturers in the rejection stance spoke about the notions of language, and the exercise of power and control, before detailing the influences of professionally-significant others. In keeping with those in the dissonant category, however, there is also some evidence of movement over time.

Language and the exercise of power and control

For one respondent in this category, who has been employed specifically to develop an industry-focused MA, he finds that claims the university has already made about what he is to achieve something of a straightjacket, and it is clear that the language the institution uses to market itself is not his preferred way of looking at things:

> *I mean there are elements of the language that the university used before I came here that I would prefer to change but it's an uphill task to do it.*

The notion of institutional positioning through language is a powerful one. It can have a significant influence on how probationers see their role and contribution, and this is not always in a positive light. Without access to cultural discourse(s), it is easy to see how isolation and alienation can result. It is worth reiterating the confusion and alienation experienced as new entrants attempt to acquire the new discourse:

> *It doesn't help that all words have a different meaning in universities does it? [laughs]*

Lacking an understanding of the discourse disempowers this probationary academic. She was being pressurised to register for a PhD by her department, and was reluctant to follow this path. With a recent background in small research projects she tried to find out whether she could accomplish her PhD by publication:

> *I searched around the website for ages and couldn't find anything, um, I rang the registry and asked them if they knew, they didn't know anything and put me through to another version of the registry, were going to ask somebody, going to get back to me, never did…*

The message from the department is very strong, and being taken very seriously, given the difficulties colleagues had found themselves in a year earlier, when their probation had been extended due to concerns over research performance. The systems within the university do not appear to support her efforts to find out what her options might be. There are other occasions when the departmental and institutional cultures can induce a sense of powerlessness in new recruits:

> *… you only find out how it's supposed to be done when you're found to be doing it wrong, so I, all of my previous work has kind of been working with people and this, I felt very kind of isolated…*

It is not only systems and processes that probationary academics feel can 'catch them out'. Unexpected difficulties when dealing with students can also raise questions about the extent of power and authority they possess:

> *Yeah, they're late, they make a noise, eat their breakfast, sometimes it looks more like a canteen than a lecture theatre, I find it quite difficult to know how tough I can be because… I don't know what I'm allowed to do… whether I just have to take all this rubbish because they're the paying customer and we have to teach them.*

Many institutions provide mentoring for new recruits to enable them to access the advice and support. In this instance, however, this has not happened and doubts about the exercise of authority and control in the classroom are undermining this

probationary lecturer's sense of self as a competent professional. Even by the final interview, towards the end of her third year of probation, classroom management is still an issue:

> *… part of what demoralised me in teaching was those students you know, they are, if I wanted to battle with discipline I'd go and teach in a secondary school… I never imagined that I would have to deal with these sorts of things…*

Her self-efficacy as a teacher (which had been such a focus and motivation for taking up her academic post) has been eroded after a year of dealing with a difficult group of first year students, which in turn has led to less commitment to the teaching aspect of her role:

> *… we talked about high-minded ideas that we should do things this way or that, when it came down to it, it was a bit like a lot of effort… or [laughs] just you know, there was the option of doing the same as last time…*

While actual classroom difficulties were the most prominent symptom of her demotivation in teaching, she also recognised that there may be underlying causes due to programme design. But she feels inhibited, due to departmental culture, in raising this concern:

> *No, I can't do it alone. I'll just end up making more enemies you know, amongst the people it's more convenient to stay in with…*

Agency, at least in relation to teaching, seems to have been undermined. When probed further in the hope of finding something satisfying in her teaching, her response was sadly resolute:

> *[long pause, shrug, laughs] Can't think of anything, it's pretty awful isn't it? I, um, [very long pause] no, there's nothing that you know, sometimes a session is OK and I think well, you know, that's all right,*

some students get something… but there's nothing, there's no thing where I think an experience like that every 15 months will keep me going, I don't think there is, no.

Her interview talk became more positive when it concerned activities related to her previous career. She talked of considering special needs teaching, drawing on her experience of working with patients with disabilities in the past. And she reflected much more positively on research collaborations with former colleagues, but not the PhD process for which she had finally registered, which she appears to find controlling:

… there's just a little research project in the [name] lab and it's all good stuff, it'll help me with things but it's not helping me get on with my thing [the PhD] but I don't want to turn down things like that because I can't and I really don't want to but it's, I know we're going to arrive August and September and people are going to say OK then, you've been registered for a PhD for 8 or 9 months now, what have you done… and I'll have nothing to say.

For the post-1992 probationer, towards the end of his only interview, there is perhaps an indication of how his thinking about academic life has been developing:

I would say the biggest question that I would ask of the universities is how, what consideration they put to retaining people in the long term. Because bureaucracy, if you've come in from a, I haven't come in here personally for an easy life and certainly if I had I'd be shocked. I'd be surprised at the amount of work but it is tempting that when you're in control of things yourself, externally, you don't have this bureaucracy… but there has to be some sign of development and I've seen things here that are typical of large organisations where people come into an organisation and they're valued, and once they're in there they're forgotten about and they feel they lose their value.

He has not been able to access any of the inter- and extra-institutional activities that Crawford (2010) details as important in terms of professional development, and clearly feels he is subject to a form of bureaucratic control that devalues his experiences and contribution. The third respondent in this category was also keen to bring previous experiences to bear on his new role and drew frequently on ideas he had encountered in his work as a business consultant:

> *I know how organisations function… the complexities of them and how politics and power structures work very differently and how power is not always residing in the as it were in the seats it's assumed to be in, so for me it's relatively easy for me to come and say well, yeah, that's the rules but look at what people do…*

He was critical of how this kind of knowledge is not drawn upon to effect change in the university:

> *Outside the academic arena I'd have to do it much, much quicker, you know… where's the power, where's the influence…*

This suggests that, in other working environments, he would be able to diagnose difficulties and find ways of working with or around them, but this might not be so easy to ascertain in academic life. He also brought a similar mindset to managing the student experience, and made use of it when he became course director:

> *… setting the scene… being able to create an expectation from the students about what it is that we're going to deliver, which I think is quite important. I think looking at some of those things that I see there's elements of, not dissatisfaction, but students whose expectations aren't met because we don't shape their expectations… In a way it's almost sleight of hand because, you know, you tell them what it is they're going to get and then you ask them at the end 'Did you get… did we meet your expectations?'*

Assuming control of the course, he is able to shape it in a way that he feels will deliver greater student satisfaction. This participant has a strong sense of how he wishes the graduate school to present its offering to students, and it is couched in a neo-liberal discourse (Davies and Petersen, 2005). This respondent can be seen, in this final interview, as exerting a level of control over his working circumstances where the other two participants in this section of the sample felt more inhibited in relation to the behaviours modelled by others in their working environment.

The role of professionally-significant others

The probationary academics in this section of the sample were older than those in other categories when they took up their first academic post. This maturity may play a role in their experiences of, and responses to, colleagues in more senior posts. Having long experience in other work environments also gives these new lecturers many models and practices with which to draw comparisons that were not readily available to those in other categories. They offered opinions as to how university processes might improve:

> *But it does concern me how people would be… how they manage that. Especially if they're inviting people from industry because these are usually people who are expectant of some kind of development or they value themselves.*

Implied here is that he had assumed a certain sort of psychological contract with the university that it would devote sufficient resource to his career development. The high workload and continuing bureaucracy of which he spoke may have been early indicators to him that the academic environment was not quite as he had imagined and that, perhaps, he was beginning to feel his role or skills were being devalued.

The second respondent from a commercial background, however, did not allude specifically to a high workload, even though his initial appointment was part-time. For him, many frustrations came from the behaviour, the 'whinging' of colleagues, and a concern with what he saw as others' complacency:

… it's very public sector in terms of the ways, what people's expectations are in terms of things like flexibility, customer service, things like that… I sometimes feel that academics don't necessarily appreciate that they have customers in the traditional sense.

Far from being reluctant to ask for help, this respondent is keen to exploit the university's '*gatekeepers'* and to develop a network as a way of finding out how the institution operates:

I will go and say, excuse me, I know it's not your problem but who should I talk to, what do I need to solve this problem… I use that informal kind of networking arrangement to find out what really goes on rather than what officially goes on because there can be a huge gulf between what is indicated on the web site and how things actually are managed and dealt with these days.

In this respect, he was unusual. The others in this category suggested that they simply did not know where to turn for advice, or even whether anyone else would be interested in their concerns:

It did surprise me quite early on how nobody, I wondered whether anyone knew or cared whether I was doing this job properly or not, and after a while I came to the conclusion that they didn't except me, you know, so, um, I've probably done some terrible things that I shouldn't have done [laughs] well, I've changed assessments on a module and not told anyone.

For this category of probationary academic, the absence of positive talk about professionally-significant others is even more striking than that reported by those in the dissonance category who sensed a lack of collegiality. One was disappointed by the 'busyness' of his mentor, meaning he felt isolated and frustrated at not knowing how to tackle new tasks, and the impact this 'not knowing' had on his work. A

second spoke of her more established colleagues as '*ungenerous'*, and the third was, perhaps, ungenerous himself:

> *I've carried on studying the new academic. And it does worry me. It's a bit like, er, joining the army at 16, you know? And you become institutionalised… We talked before about change… an incredible naivety sometimes about what's happening as if any change is negative and should be avoided and, you know, our job is to whinge… I've just sat through a three-hour meeting in which a dozen academics have all moaned. Nobody has actually offered anything constructive about what's going to happen.*

> *the environment's fine, that's OK, I can deal with that, there's worse places to work, I don't like people being complacent right, I don't want to become a 50 year old senior academic waiting for his time and it's that kind of institutionalisation that I see in newly-qualifieds that I don't want to become…*

For this small group of respondents, there is no great sense of a desire to 'fit in' to their new departments and institutions. They reported a strong sense of isolation and some of their problems appear to stem from the differences in language in use between them and more established colleagues. The locus of power and control also seem to be difficult issues, and it is perhaps because of the scale and scope of perceived difficulties within the work environment that this group was also less likely to report on any particular work-life balance issues.

The contradiction between novice and expert

Where probationers in other categories had contradictory stories of their ability to exercise agency in their new roles, those in the rejection stance towards probation brought with them a wealth of experience in other working environments, but this appeared to leave them ill-prepared for the circumstances they found themselves working in. One key issue stood out: as they hoped to exercise autonomy, but found

themselves positioned otherwise, the lack of acknowledgement of what they could bring to the role appears to be experienced as destabilising:

> *I'm a little confused about where I sit in, on the map of it all because on the one hand I'm not confirmed in my post, I'm quite inexperienced, there are lots of aspects of academic life that I don't really understand and I'm not very good at but on the other hand I am very experienced because I've worked for many years doing all sorts of different jobs and I've seen plenty of things and I don't consider myself a trainee really. I can do stuff and I don't know where, I don't even know where I see myself anymore you know, I don't want to be a kind of little debutante [laughs].*

Towards the end of her three-year probationary period, one respondent is still pulled back towards the 'competent professional' identity of her previous workplace. If anything, life in academia is almost always contrasted negatively as amateurish and unsatisfying, and not something to be aspired to. Another probationer in this section of the sample sympathised with his students: '*it's easy to forget how opaque the system is…'* whilst recognising that the same was true of his approach to the new phenomenon (for him) of intercultural teaching:

> *My intention was correct… well that's not correct, but I have no issue with intention, what I wanted to do, but the way I presented it, the student actually thought that I was being facetious and was actually ridiculing the question that had been posed… my response was flippant, not facetious…*

Finding a coherent academic identity is proving elusive for this small group, possibly in part because they do not admire the role models available to them. But it does seem that their long experience outside of academia has given them a strong sense of self, including an appreciation of their strengths and weaknesses, that is difficult to reconcile with what is expected in academic life:

I can't see things getting that much better really and one of the sort of other frustrations is that I don't really know what they want me to do. I don't know whether they want me to teach, because after all that does bring in the cash, I don't know whether they want me to research… I just don't like to do a half-baked job… and if I'm being asked to do too much either it's going to take me an age and I haven't got the patience for that or you do everything half well and everyone thinks you're no good at anything [laughs]

There was a sense in which academic identity and practice, far from being something to construct or aspire to, was something that other people did, and not necessarily very well:

the interdepartmental politics and nitpicking just, well, to be honest sometimes they just make me smirk and laugh at them because really they've got bigger things to be doing than worrying about who said what and who's authorised to say what rather than you know, being process driven, it, in the private sector as a business consultant I'd describe it as silo management, they're each in their own little silo and really what goes on in another one they don't care about as long as it doesn't impact on their silo…

Settling for 'half-baked' is not an aspiration for their academic careers, but it does seem that those who enter the academy much later in life, with a good deal of professional experiences elsewhere, find what is valued is a long way from what their previous experiences have prepared them for. They are conscious of their own skills and abilities, but find it very difficult to decode what is going on in the new work environment, in part because of a very specialised discourse that is in operation that appears to function to exclude them from academic, disciplinary and departmental practices. These issues are taken up in the discussion section below.

Discussion: ‘prior identity’ maintenance

For the small number of respondents in this study who were ascribed to a rejection stance towards probation, three key themes emerged from the data. First, the idea that language is difficult and sometimes impenetrable, which is connected to notions of power and control, are commented on below. Second, the experiences of these particularly troublesome (Perkins, 2008) influences are explored further and related to the idea of liminal spaces (Meyer and Land, 2005). These findings are then discussed in relation to the idea of whether academic practices are accessible to those with long histories elsewhere. Lastly, there is an attempt to situate the role of IPD on the experiences of, and responses to, probation that the new academics in this section of the sample report.

These findings feed in to a final synthesis and summary that contributes to the comparative discussion of the three stances towards probation elaborated in Chapter 7. It should be noted that the number of probationary academics in this section of the sample is very small. Therefore, the data presented comes from limited sources and it should be considered that this element of the analysis provides fewer grounds for drawing conclusions than other aspects of this study (although Stake (1995) would argue the validity of the single case). This is not to suggest that the respondents in the category do not hold a valid position, just that it is one that is less well-tested because of the small numbers involved. In the first instance, the power of language, and associated tacit practices (Shulman, 2005; Perkins, 2006) are investigated, to show how the unthinking use of terms and teaching practices can alienate probationary academics.

Alien words and deeds

Institutional and departmental cultures are fundamental to the experiences of all probationary academics. Those who have been ascribed a rejection stance react in particular ways to certain elements of these cultures, and this tends to colour their perceptions in negative ways. For instance across all three narrative accounts that

feature in this chapter, there were serious concerns amongst the newcomers that terminology and practices were not effective in helping them to adjust to their new roles.

Finding information was especially problematic for two of the three respondents in this category. One wondered why information about the university's procedures and regulations would be included in what the university called its 'calendar'. Another, frustrated at a lack of mentorship, and not having questions answered in a timely fashion, was unable to work out for himself the particular process to achieve the validation of a new Master's course. Delays and misunderstandings around timescales and procedures were felt to be very frustrating and, as he left the university between the first and second interview points, it is not clear how much progress he had made on pursuing the agenda that he had been employed to achieve.

The third and final respondent in this category could perhaps be described as interpreting the institutional discourse as 'weasel' words, of which he did not approve. Frequently he was critical of his new colleagues, often suggesting that their practices and attitudes were inferior to those that permeated the commercial world of his recent past. He brought a neo-liberal mindset (Davies and Petersen, 2005) to his new role and was dismissive of what he perceived to be a '*complacent'* culture in higher education.

In contrast with his colleagues, this respondent, based in a graduate school, had the opportunity to network widely across one faculty in his role, and even the institution, in relation to his PGCert. These experiences did not appear to influence his views, so that when he took up a position of authority within the graduate school – as a course director – he sought to impose on it his own particular view of appropriate academic practices. When reflecting on his own teaching experiences, he could be self-critical and thoughtful, but otherwise was unique in this section of the sample for considering his role in shaping the context in which he worked. He is the only representative of this category who remains in post at the time of writing.

The outcomes are different for the remaining two respondents. One, from a post-1992 institution, moved on within a matter of months of undertaking the first interview. The final probationer in this category remained in post for a period of time after her probation should have finished, although it is not clear whether she was confirmed, extended, or simply chose to leave. As Lawler (2008) suggests, identity is a fluid, individual and collective, work-in-progress. This new academic, with strong affiliations to the teaching aspect of the role, was clearly disheartened quite quickly in this respect, and struggled, even in the final year of her probation to construct a comfortable space for herself within academic life.

Disempowerment

Departmental practices and student behaviour were felt keenly to disempower this latter individual, who struggled to maintain the position she had developed for her own identity, that of a 'competent professional'. Being consigned (unwillingly) to novice status is a source of frustration, and trying to pursue the kinds of personal projects that Clegg (2008) writes about, whilst satisfying, are not perceived to be fulfilling departmental demands.

Perkins' (2006) notion of '*the underlying game'* is particularly relevant here. The views proposed by the participants assigned to the rejection stance illustrate a gulf between what mid-career professionals believe they can bring to the higher education environment, and what they experience once in post. Two of the respondents in this category, especially, appear to spend time trying to decode what is required of them in their new roles, and feel disempowered when they cannot find any kind of equilibrium between their expertise and university expectations. The final participant, who notices the potential for difficulties, dismisses rather than contemplates any form of disempowerment, and speaks at length of his desire to shape existing cultures and practices towards his own view of what higher education should be.

It is not only departmental and institutional cultures that contribute towards probationers' feelings of disempowerment. The attitudes and behaviours of students

also bring a sense of insecurity in the academic role. One of the new academics in this section of the sample notices that his practices are not necessarily accessible to all of the graduate students he is now responsible for. For another, it is the immaturity of the first year cohort that challenges her sense of self as a competent professional and makes her wonder where the boundaries lay with regards to her potential authority and control. The final respondent in this category has done little in the way of teaching, and therefore does not have to confront any consequences as a result of a few guest lectures. His sense of disempowerment stems from difficulties associated with internal communications and expectations, and these are elaborated further in the following section.

(Mis)understanding academic practices

Collegiality is a well-respected position valued in academic life (Macfarlane, 2007), but one which is not necessarily familiar to those who join the academy later in life with a good deal of work experience in other economic sectors. Collegiality entails wide consultation and consensus decisions. For the small number of respondents in the rejection stance towards probation, it appears that this might be mistaken for '*covering your back'* and '*being seen'* to have addressed issues publicly. Whilst there may be an element of 'being seen' to have done something, academics often debate department-wide on issues of departmental concern in the interests of establishing coherent practices.

For the probationer who had come to academic life recently from running his own company, this more consensual approach to decision-making appears both difficult and a form of 'blame-spreading', and is probably in complete contrast to previous autonomous, even autocratic, practices. Similarly, it is difficult to appreciate the boundaries around what an institution feels it can be responsible for, and the authority it delegates to the individuals within it. Where such boundaries are blurred, it becomes difficult to interpret expectations and this can lead to a sense of frustration that the role is not what was envisaged.

In the case where difficulties arise both from departmental context and student interaction – the two things that characterise any new academic's immediate context – as can be seen in the evidence from the one mid-career professional who persisted throughout her difficult APP, it is hard to see where any form of support will come from.

The role and influence of professional development

One of the three probationary lecturers in the rejection category had successfully negotiated deferred participation in his PGCert, on the basis that he did not have a sufficient teaching load to meet the course outcomes. This had not proved easy to do, and points to a paradox in institutional policies. On the one hand, the time consumed by preparing teaching for the first time suggests a reduced teaching load for probationers is desirable. On the other hand, this reduction may leave them struggling to achieve PGCert outcomes within their more limited teaching duties. This may be especially problematic when institutions require engagement and/or completion of the PGCert within a one-year probationary period. Deferring was beneficial to this participant, who was struggling with workload issues; but some elements of the programme may have been helpful as he struggled to access the validation requirements he needed.

The remaining two respondents in this category (from different institutions) were both on three-year probations and were required to complete their PGCerts as part of their probationary requirements. Both pointed to a lack of practical elements within their programmes to help them with their day-to-day teaching practices. One especially was finding classroom management a problem, but was frustrated that this issue was not addressed in her PGCert. She did find some aspects of the PGCert helpful, but experienced some difficulty in reconciling some of the theoretical constructs with her actual experience of student behaviour and approaches to study.

The other PGCert participant, in his first interview, was critical of both his colleagues' and the tutor's seeming lack of engagement with the reflective practice

(Schon, 1984) ethos of the course. By his final interview, however, he had found something positive in the programme, and been '*inspired'* by a tutor in a way that had influenced his own teaching practice. Baume and Kahn (2004) suggest that educational developers should aspire to be exemplary practitioners. This probationer's experience demonstrates the value of that aspiration, and the influence it can exert on those new to academic life.

Those in the rejection stance towards probation appear to have less criticism than other groups about the IPD they undertake, although it is acknowledged that the very small sample size makes it difficult to draw robust conclusions. It may, however, give some insight into the induction needs of the growing number of 'other' professionals (Butcher and Stoncel, forthcoming) now sought to join the academy for the valuable professional practice skills and knowledge they can offer.

Summary

In this small section of the sample, the rejection of an academic identity appeared to stem from a personal acceptance of the neoliberal agenda, and the perception that higher education in the UK currently falls far from attaining the requisite performativity. The neoliberal discourse (Davies and Petersen, 2005) is, in effect, being dismissed as little more than amateurish attempts to impose a neoliberal agenda by UK universities. Of the three interviewees who rejected engagement with Perkins' '*underlying game'* of tacit rules and values (2006), one, as noted above, was lost to the study as he left his university between the first and second interview points.

The second respondent from this group, after some time resisting higher education's performative demands, undertook the interview process in her third and final year of probation. By this point, there were signs of confronting *'the academic game'* and negotiating terms. There is a growing recognition of the rules of the game, but a subversive selectivity in which of the rules will be obeyed, in keeping perhaps with the position of those experiencing resonant socialisations. This

respondent was clear she was accommodating rather than assimilating the unexpected managerialism. This participant was actively engaging with the neoliberal agenda in areas of less personal value, whilst retaining the space for Clegg's (2008) '*principled personal autonomy'*. She too has left academic life.

The final probationer in this category, whose interview talk was frequently critical of colleagues and university systems, is the only one who remains in post. It would seem that he must have developed strategies to cope with his fear of becoming complacent. For all of the new academics in this category, however, many of the systems put in place to support their early career years, do not appear to have worked well. This suggests that traditional induction and probation procedures pose difficulties for this category of staff. The caveat that those rejecting academic practices are a small minority in this study is acknowledged. It seems, however, that the gap between expectation and experience is large, and unpleasant. For all the potential benefits that those with good professional experience could bring to the learning experiences of students, there appears a very real danger that they will not stay long enough for the benefits to be realised.

Where other commentators such as Davies and Petersen (2005) suggest that higher education institutions have already travelled too far in their efforts to survey and account for every action of their academic (and other) staff, those with recent experience in the commercial world seem to find academe's efforts in this direction amateurish. There is intention, it appears, for these new lecturers to find their niches, to contribute through teaching and research to make some small difference in the world, the position of hope that Clegg (2008) found. Realising this intention, however, is harder as the probationers struggle to find appropriate role models and local practices to which they can aspire.

Chapter 7: Contrasting perspectives on academic probation

A comparative discussion of the three stances towards academic probation elaborated in the previous findings chapters is the focus of this chapter. Similarities and differences in the reported experiences of, and responses to, the APP are discussed and a conceptual model is advanced (Figure 7.1 below), derived from the data in this study.

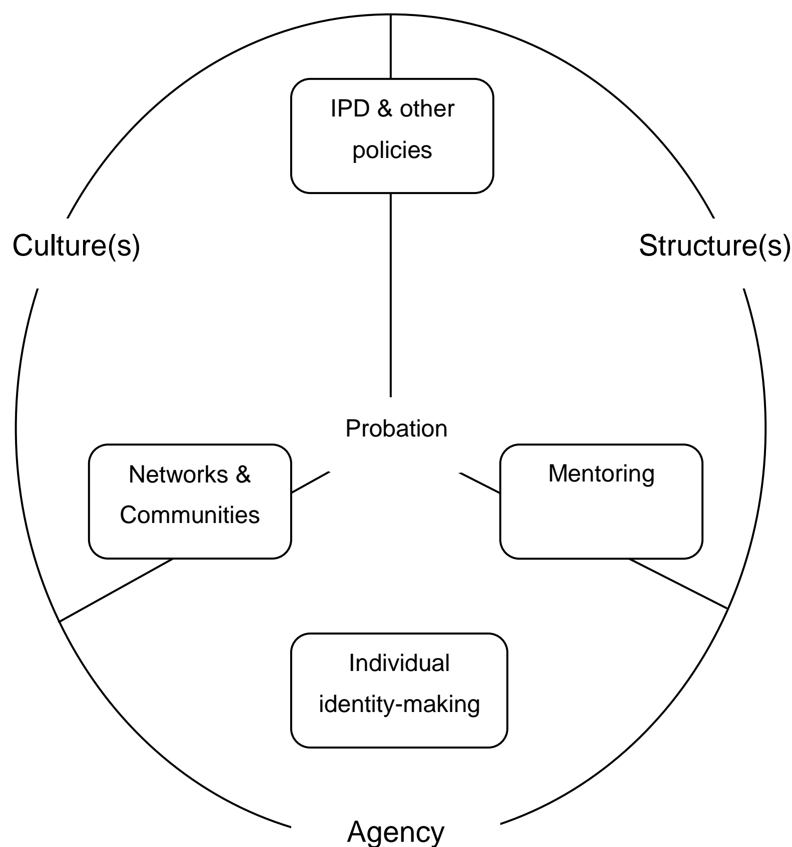

Figure 7.1: A conceptual model of the academic probationary period

The notion of probation is at the heart of the conceptual model as it can be understood as a contested and poorly-articulated phenomenon in UK higher education. From the '*experience-centred narratives'* (Squire, 2008) collected in this study, it has been possible, through the theoretical lens of critical realism (Archer,

1995, 2003), and especially the notion of a morphogenetic approach (Archer, 1995), to order rich qualitative data into an emergent typology of stances towards the APP, summarised in Figure 7.2 (below). Following the summary typology, the APP is examined for converging/diverging views of institutional and departmental cultures, structural demands and perceived potential for agency. This is followed by a discussion of how the findings from the different analytic categories relate to my key research questions. The aim is to explore opportunities in institutional, departmental and IPD activities that may impact positively on the support that can be developed for probationary lecturers, which are considered further in the conclusions for policy and practice detailed in Chapter 8.

The tripartite model of stances towards academic probation that emerged from the data, detailed in depth in the preceding three chapters, is summarised using participants' vocabulary in Figure 7.2 (below) as an aide memoire. The language used by respondents, thus summarised, can be seen to infer different experiences, and very different views of the probationary process, ones which are not always positive. The most distinctive feature in interview talk surrounded the potential for agency that these new academics felt they were able to exert in their new roles, so it is to this aspect of the study that I turn first in the following section.

Resonant	**Dissonant**	**Rejection**
Focused	Infantilised	Gatekeepers
Huge opportunities	Uncooperative	Politics and nitpicking
Friendly department	Managerialist	Peculiar environment
Career choice	Lacking collegiality	Customer/service
Strategic	Outraged	Silo mentality

Figure 7.2: An emergent typology of the academic probationary period

Before doing so, however, it is necessary to highlight that the first two analytic categories of resonance and dissonance contain 10 respondents each. The final category, of rejection, featured the testimony of only three new academics, and therefore provides a much weaker evidence base from which to draw conclusions. It

is not suggested that this category be overlooked, as those who constitute it do form a distinctive voice. I simply wish to be clear that there is more substantial evidence to support the first two stances towards the APP.

The potential for agency amongst probationary academics

As noted above, the potential for agency was the distinguishing feature that was used to ascribe the probationary academics to the stances described in the preceding chapters. It is not suggested that 'agency' is a fixed trait, but a concept that shapes fluid identities that are negotiated both individually and collectively (Lawler, 2008) as individuals find themselves in new and different situations. This position is sustained by drawing attention to *'agential reflexivity that actively mediates between our structurally shaped circumstances and what we deliberatively make of them'* (Archer, 2003: 130). It is clear, therefore, that the individuals involved in this study do not possess 'quantities' of agency that they can bring to bear in their new roles, but by their capacity to exercise agency by reflecting accurately on the conditions under which they operate. Where conditions are understood only partially, then any such reflective mediation may be focused on a mis-diagnosis or misunderstanding. Those in the rejection stance towards probation may especially be at risk here, as they lack exposure to the practices of the disciplinary tribe (Becher and Trowler, 2001) that they have joined. Without access to longstanding disciplinary practices, not having been immersed in them through, for instance, doctoral study (see Chapter 6), it becomes difficult to decode what is most valued; therefore, attention may be focused on particular local practices that cause immediate frustration at the expense of the actual structures at play.

It is not only those in the rejection stance who have difficulties in this regard. For many in the dissonance category, their reflections relate, understandably, to experiences of previous roles and their deliberations may focus on such prior experiences. Becher and Trowler (2001) write of *'pecking orders'* within research communities and the norms and conventions of these particular practices can be internalised through PhD and post-doctoral roles. Moving to an institution that occupies a different space within the '*pecking order'* can lead to deliberations that

focus on the changed nature of the working environment, rather than addressing the current structural requirements. Those in both dissonant and rejection categories can be seen to have entered a liminal space (Meyer and Land, 2003), in a way that does not appear to afflict those in the resonant category.

Davies and Petersen (2005) and Head (2011) characterise a changed nature of higher education practices as institutions submit to the *'audit culture'* (Strathern, 2000) regime that shapes all publicly-funded universities' management strategies (Head, 2011). The potential for agency, therefore, is constrained by communicative structures that govern what is 'thinkable' and 'do-able' where these might differ greatly due to the relative positioning of institutions within a '*pecking order'*. This difficulty is exacerbated by the increasingly mobile academic workforce (Green and Myatt, 2011) where probationers not only need to come to understand an institutional ethos and its structures, but potentially entirely alien national cultures as well.

As Archer (2003: 131) asserts, *'[c]onditional influences may be agentially evaded, endorsed, repudiated or contravened'* and the potential to make these judgements, in ways similar to Dowd and Kaplan's (2005), '*boundaried and boundaryless'* distinction, is in evidence. It is clear from interview talk that respondents do not always benefit from the '*joint enterprise'* of a local community of practice (Wenger, 1998). For those in the resonant category, this appears to be because they have been employed specifically to widen the reach of a particular department – but this does not appear to hinder their potential to exercise agency. Those in the other categories clearly find establishing new areas or ways of working more difficult.

The *'audit culture'* (Strathern, 2000) and '*structurally shaped circumstances'* (Archer, 2003: 130) apply equally across all groups. However, as in Dowd and Kaplan's typology, those in the resonant stance reflect the '*mavericks'* (2005: 705) and seem more able to develop strategies to circumvent the difficult aspects of institutional structures. It is suggested that Archer's (2003: 131) '*conditional influences'* provides a useful explanation for why the APP demands are differently interpreted.

The idea of '*ontological security'* that Giddens (1984) puts forward consists in the notion that individuals develop routines that are reassuring and familiar and that a personal equilibrium can be derived from such familiarity. It is argued here that disruption to such familiarity lies at the heart of probationers' potential to exercise agency in their new roles. Specifically, Archer (2003: 132-3) suggests that '*structural and cultural factors do not exert causal powers in relation to human beings, but rather in relation to our emergent powers to formulate social objectives'*. From the evidence presented in the preceding chapters, it is this idea of the '*social objectives'* of their role as new academics that enables or constrains probationers to take action to operate effectively in their new environments. It is the level of perceived agency, in any particular social situation, of which the immediate work environment is a key mediator that determines what probationary academics feel is attainable, and shapes how they experience their new roles.

Agency is a dispositional quality and Dweck (2000) shows how it can be affected by the feedback received on even the earliest learning experiences. The prevalence of a 'feedback vacuum' described by many respondents in this study points towards a key issue – that where the '*conditional influences'* (Archer, 2003) are unpropitious – this can undermine to a greater or lesser extent the sense of self-efficacy probationers bring to their roles. Goffman's (1959) notion of 'backstage' captures something of an informal space where performances can be rehearsed but increasing surveillance (Davies and Petersen, 2005) suggests that such spaces may be being eroded. Where this is the case, probationary academics are likely to find useful feedback or the informal *'learning on the job'* that Knight, Tait and Yorke (2006) advocate, harder to access.

The greatest difficulties for the probationers in this study appear to exist in departments that are not felt to be collegial and supportive. In these instances, the '*underlying game'* (Perkins, 2006) proves intractable, and the new academics experience their probationary process as a series of competing and conflicting demands and find it difficult to establish priorities. The extended liminal space (Meyer and Land, 2003) of a three-year probationary period in particular serves to reinforce a sense of a lack of control in setting and shaping new academics' appropriate *'social objectives'* (Archer, 2003). This issue is most easily avoided by

those who identify more easily with their institutional and departmental environments, which are discussed in the following sections.

Perceptions of institutional cultures

Whilst the probationary academics in this study were far more likely to talk about the local practices (see next section), some did try and convey understandings of their institutions, its espoused mission and objectives, and to relate this to the way they felt their discipline areas were treated. Archer (1996) draws a distinction between cultural systems and socio-cultural integration which it is appropriate to revisit here:

> *causal relationships are contingent (they 'may' pertain) whereas logical relationships* do *obtain... Thus the cultural system is composed of entia which stand in logical relations to one another – the most important of which are those of consistency and contradiction between items since* both *are vital elements of an adequate theory of cultural stability and change* (Archer, 1996: 105, emphasis in original).

Her argument as it applies to this study would see an institution as a cultural system with its logical relations of departments and services, often ranked, as Becher and Trowler (2001) note, into a hierarchy of decreasing status that determines how resources are allocated. The probationers in this study were often able to remark on contradictions, in two areas in particular. First, increasing institutional espousal of excellence (Watson, 2009) was sometimes seen to be undermined by long-standing institutional practices (Trowler, 1998) by all categories of respondents. Second, institutional change – such as the appointment of a new vice-chancellor/dean – led to opportunities or threats for some in each category. Reports of consistency, however, were not a feature of interview talk, which perhaps begins to explain differential departmental practices that shaped experiences of the APP.

Probationers were aware of being positioned in particular ways by institutional policies, sometimes ambiguously (Henkel, 2000). Responses to this positioning covered most of Merton's (1968) spectrum with those in the dissonance and rejection categories far more likely to identify with institutional priorities (Dowd and Kaplan, 2005). Those in the resonance stance were more likely (but not exclusively) to feel empowered rather than disenfranchised (Archer, 2008a) by the institutional rhetoric that surrounded them. The '*potential for freedom'* of which about a quarter of respondents spoke specifically in relation to academic roles was often qualified, in the sense that it remained a potentiality rather than a reality. This was especially the case for international participants in this study, those who had moved from traditionally research-intensive universities to other kinds of institutions and mid-career professionals joining academia later in life.

For those in the rejection category who arrived with a sense of 'competent professional' the potentiality for academic freedom seemed almost disabling, placing them firmly in the 'boundaried' position that Dowd and Kaplan (2005) suggest. Institutional practices whilst unfathomable to them, dictated their '*social objectives'* (Archer, 2003). They had little sense of the '*cultures of disciplines'* that Becher and Trowler (2001) describe, or their own role as agents within it. As Archer (2008b) suggests, this is a group that can feel marginalised, and take time to develop an authentic academic identity (Henkel, 2000). At least in part, this is attributable to an inhospitable institutional culture as those in different circumstances can find their professional expertise valued (Butcher and Stoncel, forthcoming).

One surprising view was elicited from the mid-career professionals who came to academic life later, all of whom were ascribed to the rejection stance. Much is written about the pervasiveness of a neoliberal, managerialist discourse in higher education (see Davies and Petersen, 2005; Deem *et al.,* 2007; Strathern, 2000), but the probationers in the rejection category in this study voiced concerns about the extent to which their institutions remained 'amateur', failing to recognise the student (and market) imperatives which Roger Brown (2011) sees as fundamental to 'positional' good and not a 'cost' function. Those in the resonant and dissonant categories were more likely to accept these ways of functioning, even if they were

not especially appreciated. From the evidence in this study, it seems that those in the resonant category were more prepared to (try to) subvert institutional rhetoric in pursuit of their own goals (Dowd and Kaplan, 2005), whilst those in the dissonant stance were more likely to feel constrained in this regard.

In pursuing Brown's (2011) line of thought, probationary academics across all three analytic categories represented in the previous chapters had concerns that the value base of higher education (Macfarlane, 2007) was being eroded. Watson (2009: 3) summarises this position thus: '*We can't give students what they really need, but it is our duty to attract the very best to come to study with us.'* There is evidence in this study that 'affordability' shapes decisions about the types of teaching that can take place that impinges on academic autonomy and, in some instances, removes rewarding aspects of the academic role. In the dissonant category in particular, individuals were most likely to suggest an erosion of values was at play.

There is also confusion about the conflicting signals being sent by institutions to all staff, not only those who are currently subject to the APP. Institutions most commonly make explicit the IPD required related to teaching roles (Gosling, 2010). Once in post, however, Archer's (1996) '*contradictions'* come in to play and probationers find that whilst they have requirements related to teaching qualifications, it is their research performance that will ultimately decide their confirmation in post. The levels of performance required remain, for the most part, uncodified and can therefore be a considerable source of stress. Very few respondents in this study were unaware of research obligations, but for some this did remain aspirational, in contrast to the '*publish or perish'* maxim used in American contexts for gaining tenure (Dowd and Kaplan, 2005). It is suggested that the cyclical nature of research assessment in the UK (RAE, 2008) brings the publication imperative '*into view'* (Meyer and Land, 2003) at precise moments that can have an impact on the APP in relation to where in the cycle new academics take up post.

Institutions have a considerable role to play in ensuring they send coherent and consistent messages to their probationary staff, and to ensure that they have

policies in place that are fit for purpose and that their new academics can have confidence in. The evidence accumulated in this study suggests that this is not always the case, although exceptions (for instance, University of Strathclyde, 2011) can be found. It is also the case that institutional policy may be in place, but there is still considerable latitude in how this is interpreted and implemented at a more local level, and this is the focus of the following section of this chapter.

Perceptions of departmental cultures

Local practices with a department can represent a disciplinary culture, argued Becher and Trowler (2001). Initially, Becher (1989) had researched only established staff in elite institutions and focused on individual practices. This scope was broadened in a second edition (Becher and Trowler, 2001) and the move towards more collaborative working was evident. The greater demands for collective work, reflected in, for instance, the criteria used for research assessment (RAE, 2008) as indicators of a productive research environment demonstrates how central the departmental locus of control has become. For Trowler and Cooper (2002), this is privileged in relation to how teaching is conducted, and for Trowler and Knight (2000) induction is portrayed as departmental responsibility.

The danger in these models of centring responsibility within departments is that probationers are subject to local practices that may not support institutional missions and imperatives (Henkel, 2000; Trowler, 1998), and that also may prove to be arbitrary as a result of the contingency of causal relationships Archer (1996). As noted above, institutions deal with the logical relations between various entities; departments necessarily depend more concretely on the socio-cultural relations between members of staff. At this level, contingency plays a greater role as the availability of influential role models colours the perceptions of probationary academics.

Those in positions of authority have a clear role to play in shaping probationers' experiences (Trowler and Knight, 2000). Where socio-cultural integration is sound,

departments are felt to be collegial spaces (Becher and Trowler, 2001) and probationers in the resonant stance feel that workload allocation is fair; teaching and administration demands are felt to be appropriate and research activity, whilst difficult to get underway, is known to be a priority that fits with the probationers' goals. Socio-cultural relations can be problematic, however, which, as can be seen in the evidence of those in the dissonant and rejection categories, can lead to a good deal of uncertainty. The leadership of a department can be called into question where it is perceived that senior managers are 'out for themselves' or do not appear to provide leadership at all. Sub-groups can develop displaying *'[r]ecurrent behaviours which are usually so normalised for participants that they are invisible'* (Trowler, 2008: 24). These behaviours, whilst 'normal' for more established staff are far from visible to the newcomer but why and how these practices are enacted (Trowler, 2008) goes unremarked. Decoding these influences in departments that are felt to be less collegial or subject to silo management techniques present a significant barrier for those in the dissonance and rejection categories.

Examples of this difficulty can be seen in the allocation of teaching duties that are challenging, the lack of appropriate (or any) mentoring and once again the feedback vacuum, where probationers feel guidance is not available. There is a sense of disempowerment where new academics in all categories feel they are not helped to understand a department's systems and processes. Those in the resonant stance, however, look to wider communities (Wenger, 1998; Dowd and Kaplan, 2005), but those in dissonance and rejection categories feel departments may be punitive instead of supportive when they get things wrong. Rather than the ideal *'joint enterprise'* of a local community of practice (Wenger, 1998), some probationers have a perception of a community that excludes, and they can form a dim view of the '*normalised'* practices (Trowler, 2008) and attitudes (Archer, 2008a, b) of their departments.

For many in the dissonant and rejection categories, some of the practices they observed were felt to be inappropriate, such as the limited forms of action that were permitted when dealing with instances of plagiarism or a lack of transparency surrounding the allocation of teaching duties. The increasing control of universities by central administrations (Henkel, 2000) suggests that compliance was required at

departmental level which would shape their practices in line with the greater risk-aversion present in the institution (McWilliam, 2009). The imperative to comply with an institutional agenda can clash with the values that new academics bring with them to academic life which, when they experience difficulties such as student plagiarism or exam cheating leads them to question their perceptions of the values underpinning academic practice.

The centralising tendency in universities and thus the need for compliance at departmental level was a rational response to the quality assurance agenda that emerged in the 1990s (Henkel, 2000). The newly '*normalised behaviours'* (Trowler, 2008) feed in to induction practices conducted locally (Trowler and Knight, 2000) and may, therefore, be less open to question. More recently, however, there has been a greater demand for probationary academics to participate in centrally provided IPD (which is the focus of the next section of this chapter). This participation may not always be the preferred mode for learning about their new roles (Knight, Tait and Yorke, 2006) as it exposes new academics to practices beyond the local (Trowler and Knight, 2000) and, as seen in the findings chapters, can foreground inequitable APP demands.

Participation in a PGCert can therefore engender a 'cohort effect' where specific departmental practices are discussed and held up to scrutiny in multidisciplinary classrooms. Significant differences in departmental expectations of probationary academics can therefore come to light where the PGCert cohort is given the opportunity to discuss what is required of them. The most uncomfortable issue for some of the new academics in this study was the lack of comparability of teaching workloads. Whilst it is acknowledged that there are fundamental disciplinary differences in the forms and quantities of teaching required, what became clear in this study is that at some institutions, closely related departments had very different expectations. For those in the dissonance and rejection categories, this disparity was a further source of uncertainty that separated colleagues in the same institution into different analytic categories in this study. Their potential for agency, and their ability to pursue a research agenda were, they felt, constrained by these differential expectations.

In contrast, those in the resonant category were far more likely to assert that their teaching workload was consonant with their interests and expertise, and that there was adequate time to exert *'principled personal autonomy'* (Clegg, 2008) in a supportive department. The fundamental approach to workload allocation clearly has implications for the APP, and is an issue rarely addressed. All of the new academics in this study were aware of institutional policy that reduced teaching loads for them; how their departments interpreted this policy, however, varied greatly. If induction remains as a local activity system (Trowler and Knight, 2000), this variability – and its potential impact on satisfactory completion of probation – would not be visible. Socio-cultural integration (Archer, 2003) would induct probationers into 'recurrent practices' (Trowler, 2008) that may be at odds with the more centralised and uniform procedures that Henkel (2000) and Davies and Petersen (2005) suggest now govern university practices.

Perceptions of structural demands

Initial professional development

All of the respondents in this study characterised the academic role as constituting teaching, research and administration, whether or not they were actually actively pursuing research themselves. Added to these particular structural demands, the APP and the need to undertake IPD were also features of interview talk, although it should be noted that IPD was often an activity that was not mentioned spontaneously. Crawford (2010) encouraged academics in her study to construe professional development in their own terms, which leads to valuable insights into how this form of activity is perceived. The absence of voluntary mention of a PGCert in many cases suggests that it is not necessarily a key influence on probationers. As the most explicit requirement to be fulfilled during probation, however, the PGCert and how it is experienced, is explored first in this section, followed by a discussion of other academic expectations such as teaching, research and administration.

Participants in each of the three analytic categories in this study had different critiques of the PGCerts they were required to undertake (and this was an expectation on all bar one of the new academics in the sample. One, a qualified school teacher worked in an institution where he was exempt from PGCert participation). For those in the resonant category, the criticisms tended to revolve around substantive content areas such as innovation in assessment practices and the use of e-learning. For those in the dissonant category, there were more concerns about the practices and processes modelled in the PGCert. For those in the rejection category, only two of the three respondents undertook their PGCert and whilst they found parts of the course helpful, they struggled to see how it connected with their teaching experience.

Those who teach on PGCerts come from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds with a commensurate number of '*ways of thinking and practising'* (McCune and Hounsell, 2005) which will not be able to address the range of '*disciplinary tribes'* (Becher and Trowler, 2001) represented in their classes. Added to disciplinary differences are personal and professional orientations and institutional demands (Land, 2004). These influences can be another manifestation of the '*conditional influences'* and *'agential reflexivity'* (Archer, 2003) available to probationers to interpret the demands that are placed upon them.

Most of the probationers in this study who were required to engage with a PGCert were, initially, supportive of this requirement, feeling that it was entirely appropriate to be asked to obtain a professional teaching qualification. This positive view was not always sustained for long. Those in the resonant category, had difficulties in relation to particular practices. In several institutions, e-learning was interpreted as an institutional imperative, but in the PGCert as a topic that was not handled well. The technologies available within institutional contexts to support learning and teaching remained obscure in one programme; in another they were felt to be exclusive and often inappropriate. Part of this dissatisfaction derived from perceptions of strong disciplinary practices (for engineers) regarding reliability of information. There seemed to be a relation between acceptance of the use of technology and the actual need to use it. Where it remained a potential technique for teaching and learning, classes focusing on e-learning were seen as less

satisfying than in those instances where some form of online or distance learning formed part of the probationer's role.

Most contentious within a PGCert for those in the resonant category were ideas related to innovative assessment techniques that were not felt to match the nature of a participant's discipline. Webb (1997) and Haggis (2003) question the values-based agenda that underpin such positions that manifest themselves in PGCerts. Many participants in the resonant stance suggested that whilst the new ideas surrounding assessment put forward in their courses were interesting, they did not necessarily support what they perceived to be the key pedagogic goals of their disciplines. There was also critique of the assessment practices of the PGCert itself, especially where this was felt to be incongruent with the ideas that had been espoused in the course. In this respect, the 't*eaching and learning regime' of* the PGCert (Trowler and Cooper, 2002) appears to fail on both levels.

An overtly managerialist, quality control and 'disciplinarian' ethos was felt by some in the dissonant category to be a serious issue within their PGCerts. These programmes can be interpreted as embodying a '*domesticating'* tendency rather than a '*liberating'* one (Land, 2004). The academics in this category are already struggling with their departmental cultures (Becher and Trowler, 2001) and the practices therein (Trowler, 2008), and feel constrained by a neoliberal managerialist agenda (Davies and Petersen, 2005). Their critiques centre around a lack of '*self-wisdom'* (Bamber, 2009) on the part of those teaching the PGCert, and those who do not appear to apply a coherent model of reflective practice (Kahn *et al.,* 2008). The irony of '*reflecting wrongly'* was not lost on one participant.

The tension between disciplinarity versus generic-ness (Comber and Walsh, 2008) has long been a complaint levelled at PGCerts. For one probationer in this study, it was clearly a difficulty in an institutional programme that appeared to her to privilege generic issues, and implicit in the testimony of others. This suggests that some programmes lack a degree of flexibility that can also result in a level of disengagement. This issue is also related to the experience of others, who struggle to connect what is taught on the PGCert with their lived experiences, for whom courses do have an element of '*ethereal'* but not practical interest. It is this lack of

practical application that perhaps undermines claims of the benefit of '*conceptual change'* programmes of IPD (Prosser *et al.,* 2006). Such '*conceptual change'* epiphanies were reported by only two participants, suggesting that the focus for a PGCert should be more tailored to the local circumstances of participants rather than a generic model of good practice.

Time and timing were also concerns for almost all of the probationers in this study. For some, it was clear that the PGCert was an intrusion into time that they would otherwise have spent pursuing the research agenda prioritised by their departments whilst for others the time investment detracted from that available to actually meet their teaching commitments. Of more concern, perhaps, were the reflective demands of courses that were not supported by actual teaching activities. This is an issue especially for those who have to meet a one-year probationary requirement which means they must undertake tasks on the PGCert for which their current teaching duties do not allow them the scope to meet the outcomes in an authentic way (Archer, 2008b; Sadler, 2008).

The academic role: teaching, research, administration

If a PGCert can cause difficulties in relation to the APP, the teaching to which it relates appears for most in this study to be a rewarding and enjoyable task. There are, of course, challenges in the teaching role that came as a surprise to probationers (such as student behaviour and departmental policies that undermine preferred practices). Where seminar or tutorial teaching was withdrawn, this was seen as detrimental as it was seen as a rewarding form of teaching where students could be stretched (hooks, 1994), and this desire was driven by a concern beyond a view of teaching as transmitting content. Where one probationer joined a department that had already removed tutorials, her concern was to reinstate them in a move to develop professional practice amongst her students. Almost always, across all three groups, seminar and tutorial teaching were suggested as preferred alternatives to large lecture courses, although the new academics in this study were realistic about how difficult this was to sustain in a massified system of higher education.

For those with limited teaching experience before they came to their first academic posts, the enjoyable nature of teaching appeared to be a surprise. With little prior experience to draw on, it was an aspect of the role that caused them some concern and many reported struggling with preparation time. Gauging how students were experiencing their teaching was also an issue, and some deliberately went out of their way to seek additional feedback. In some institutions, the formal teaching feedback process was criticised as bureaucratic, and institutional mechanisms – such as the provision of standard evaluation questionnaires that needed to be returned to central administration in a sealed box – was felt to be unhelpful, and indeed could be circumvented. Where feedback was positive, however, as Sadler (2008) found, this increased new lecturers' confidence which supported their enjoyment of this aspect of their role.

Many of the probationary academics in this study were subject to some form of peer observation, which allows feedback from more experienced colleagues in addition to student evaluations. Where this was done in a formative fashion it was felt to be a supportive process which could increase confidence in teaching performance. One institution, however, appeared to reserve peer observation as a management tool for those in their final year of probation; one observation by a member of the professional development centre was felt to have an unduly central role in judging teaching performance and thereby feeding into a probationary judgement.

Almost all of the probationers in this study spoke throughout their interviews in a student-centred manner, perhaps contradicting literature that suggests beginning lecturers tend towards a teacher-centred view (Prosser *et al.,* 2006). References to engagement, empowerment and critical thinking (hooks, 1994) were common, suggesting an outlook that went beyond an immediate concern for academic study and more towards learner development (Barnett, 2007). Activities within large lectures to apply knowledge, along with role play activities and choice in assessment were the most common strategies to encourage engagement. This desire for student-centred activities (Ramsden, 2003) was found across all three analytic categories, but poor student responses weakened resolve more in those in the dissonant and rejection stances.

Where it was necessary for lecturers to provide comprehensive notes online in advance of lectures, this was felt to detract from attendance, to which the response was to cover different issues in lectures that then found their way into exam questions. This response to departmental policy was noted most often in the dissonant category, and may be related to the erosion in values (Macfarlane, 2007). In one instance, for a probationer in the rejection category, this policy was found to stifle creativity and change – rather than update notes and upload copies to course sites and central administrative structures, the temptation was to leave material as it was.

The power of staff-student committees was also considered negatively for lecturers who wished to challenge students by setting open-ended tasks. Where the lack of structure was seen as a good thing by some new academics, in that it would allow students to apply what was being taught, for the students, this challenge, differing from what they were used to, could be perceived as unfair. This meant that some new academics changed their approach to teaching and assessment; others, however, were more successful in communicating their expectations of self-regulated learning (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) and were pleased with student efforts. In assessing for the first time, the probationers in this study took their role seriously and often spent far longer on this task than their more experienced peers. They also seemed to reflect seriously on what the students' efforts could tell them about their teaching practice (Ashby, in Brewer, 1985).

Some student behaviour, however, was challenging and surprising to these new academics. Persistent lateness, absence and lack of respect were an unwelcome surprise that could undermine probationers. One of the greatest issues was for the new academics to know how far their authority stretched in terms of discipline, classroom management and 'laying down the law' in respect of classroom behaviour, especially when institutions deployed student satisfaction evaluations at the end of every course. For some, their initial enthusiasm for teaching in a student-centred manner was damaged by poor student behaviours, to the point that by final interviews, they were candid enough to suggest that they 'cared less' about this aspect of their roles and perhaps understood better why more experienced colleagues had also adopted this position. Where student behaviour, and thus

feedback, was unrewarding, it is easy to see how the probationers' emphasis shifted towards the research performance that they now understood to be a greater determinant of their success in academic life (Lucas, 2006)

Teaching, as an activity where probationers were less likely to be experienced, was a dominant concern for many as they came to academic life. It did not take long, however, for the probationers to appreciate the priority that their departments put on research and publication activities. Only two new lecturers in this study felt that undertaking research was a goal, rather than a pressing demand. For the remainder, the competitive nature of research funding and publication was a very real concern. For some, the pressure that the research imperative brought was a personal, rather than departmental concern as it went to the heart of the academic identity that they sought to establish.

Those in STEM areas were more likely, though not necessarily, able to access start-up grants to begin their independent research careers. One engineer remarked on his naivety in not negotiating access to institutional funds before taking up post. To ensure he remained visibly research-active, he addressed this difficulty by writing review papers and several grant applications across the year he was involved in the study. Others, including this engineer, were very aware of the importance of developing suitable networks to progress their research efforts, but were perhaps a little surprised at how difficult this proved to be. Often, this complaint was related to poor communication practices within their institutions, where they felt inhibited by their junior roles. Scientists in particular felt the pressure to secure early grants, as the practice in these '*urban'* disciplines (Becher and Trowler, 2001) values them establishing their own teams for research purposes.

The competition in STEM research funding was also recognised by those in the social sciences, but there was more appreciation that collaborative efforts within a local community of practice (Wenger, 1998) may be an equally productive way forward. Gaining access to these communities, however, presented an equally difficult barrier, often felt to be made harder by institutional arrangements. Social scientists were more likely to draw on contacts from previous roles as PhD students or postdocs to support their research efforts. The tensions between the prevailing

cultural system and the socio-cultural integration within it (Archer, 2003) were clear, and most of the respondents in this study commented on the difficulties of pursuing their research agendas (Lucas, 2006) that were often sidelined by the more immediate demands of their teaching schedules. The difficulties of developing research were apparent, even for those with limited teaching duties, as the essential networks (Becher and Trowler, 2001) proved hard to establish for all categories.

The cyclical nature of the UK's research assessment exercise (RAE,2008) was also evident in this study, even where its importance was not necessarily fully understood. Pilot interviews took place within the academic year 2006-07, where the end of 2007 was the cut-off date for publications, funding and esteem factors to be taken into account (RAE, 2008). The probationers in post at this time came under varying degrees of departmental pressure to make an RAE return. Those coming to terms with teaching workloads spoke of deferring research and writing to what they perceived to be holiday periods and perhaps did not appreciate the institutional concern for RAE submissions. Various mechanisms – from departmental meetings to individual appraisals – were used to communicate the research and publication imperatives, which for some, added to their appreciation of the APP, now understood to comprise more than the officially communicated demand of gaining a teaching qualification.

The balance of the interviews in this study took place mostly in the academic year 2007-08, with some spilling over into 2008-09. As these were beyond the official deadline for RAE submission, there was an absence of talk about research assessment. Only one respondent referred to the RAE's replacement, the research excellence framework (HEFCE, 2011), suggesting that there is a lack of strategic awareness amongst probationers of all the elements that will be used to judge their performance. For all bar one of those who took part in the main study, the RAE or its replacement, the REF, were not felt to be significant drivers of their behaviour. One probationary academic in the dissonant stance, however, was in no doubt about the departmental and institutional imperative of research. He was frustrated that, whilst undertaking research and achieving good quality publications, the focus within his department was actually on research income, not actually on conducting research.

Other institutions clearly valued good-quality publications, but this was a surprise to a number of probationary academics. Sometimes there was confusion surrounding the focus on research, as the new lecturers began to realise the funding implications of retaining students. Teaching, therefore, was often felt to be a more pressing demand that took precedence over research and publication, especially when publication goals were felt to be unrealistic. Those who appreciated the significance of good quality publications (Lucas, 2006) adopted a variety of strategies to achieve it, from producing large volumes of writing, to writing reviews with the potential to be highly-cited, to writing fewer but more better targeted papers aimed at higher quality outlets. The more proactive writers in this sample appeared to more driven by communicating their research, with institutional imperatives of less concern. Those who had yet to publish expressed concerns over how difficult publication was to achieve, and their fears of being assessed poorly on this measure, and these respondents came exclusively from the resonant and dissonant stances.

The amount of administration, and the time it consumed, was also perceived negatively by many respondents from all categories. Post-1992 institutions are often perceived to have more bureaucratic procedures than their pre-1992 counterparts in the UK higher education system, and there is evidence in this study that this perception is well-founded. The monitoring of student progress, an issue that appeared to be handled centrally by pre-1992 institutions, appears to be a duty that falls to individual academics in post-1992 settings, and one that is felt to be time-consuming. There were also more complaints from post-1992 academics regarding the amount of time spent in departmental or other meetings, especially those related to IPD and quality assurance.

Pre-1992 participants in this study also referred to IPD that occupied time they would have preferred to spend on other activities, and this was especially the case in one institution that did not appear to timetable IPD activity in a sensitive fashion. Following perceived unproductive meetings and professional development, the amount of time expended on informal, ad-hoc student support was felt to be a burden for both pre- and post-1992 respondents across all categories. This criticism related to how such activity was not recognised in workload allocation schedules. There is some evidence that this kind of support can be seen to be a gendered

activity (Clegg, 2010), with women appearing to assume more student support activity than men.

Administration is flagged as a fundamental academic duty, part of the service component (Macfarlane, 2007) that enables universities to function effectively. Many participants in this study expected administrative duties as part of their new roles, but for some, this took more time than they expected. One important function, categorised as administration as it is neither direct teaching nor research, is the exam board that many academics participate in. In this study, it was interesting to note that there was variation in understanding amongst probationers as to the role they could play in the exam board process. It is acknowledged that thoughts about exam board activities, which clearly had an impact on a small number of new academics in this study, is a (deliberate) function of the timing of the interviews undertaken. Whereas other administrative duties – such as departmental meetings – had the potential to allow the probationary academics to get to meet new colleagues and feel at home in their new situations, others, such as the exam board, presented challenges.

Amongst those who had encountered an exam board for the first time just prior to undertaking the final interview for this study, some expressed ambivalence towards their role and attendance, feeling the process was a formality. A limited number, however, reported on practices that surprised them, such as the moving of classification boundaries, the consideration of mitigating factors, and especially the way in which perceived poor academic practices (plagiarism, exam cheating, the awarding of year prizes) were not given as much attention as they were perceived to deserve. In one instance, it appears that the marks submitted to the exam board had been altered from those actually awarded; this, along with the awarding of a class prize to a student who is perceived to be undeserving, are actions at exam board that make probationers question the *'social objectives'* (Archer, 2003) that dominate the departments they have joined.

Those subject to the APP who are confronted with difficult practices may problematise the value base of higher education (Macfarlane, 2007), and some struggle to reconcile departmental practices with their own views (Trowler, 1998).

Others, however, and especially in pre-1992 contexts, recognise that they are exempted from onerous administrative duties whilst they are on probation. They are relieved, in the most part, to be spared from such activities, which allows them to focus on their research and teaching, but some realise that as a result, they are unaware how decisions are made within their home departments that ultimately may have a bearing on their future duties. In contrast, some probationers have a tendency to acquire administrative duties in order to be seen as a good *'academic citizen'* (Macfarlane, 2007) as a way of understanding how things function in their departments. Sometimes belatedly, the probationary academics in this study realised that the impact of particular administrative roles conflicted with their desires to focus on teaching and research duties; the initial banality of counting fire extinguishers can become an irritation, as can the growing realisation that administrative duties, once accepted, can become difficult to dispense with.

The potential for agency, which can differ significantly amongst the probationary academics in various categories, is a key influence on experiences of, and responses to the APP in UK higher education. In trying to separate out cultural, structural and agentic features (Archer, 2003) it is possible to explore the variety of influences at work on new academics in relation to '*academic tribes and territories'* (Becher and Trowler, 2001), managerialist cultures (Davies and Petersen, 2005; Deem *et al.,* 2007), *'principled personal autonomy'* (Clegg, 2008) and IPD demands (Prosser *et al.,* 2006). Considering these aspects of the academic role is the function of the following section of this chapter, with particular regard to the notion of potential for agency (Archer, 2003) and the contribution that can be made by a consideration of Archer's '*morphogenetic approach'* (Archer, 1995) to understanding personal and professional transition and the negotiation of the liminal space (Meyer and Land, 2003).

Stability, oscillation and 'prior identity' maintenance: concepts to guide development and feedback

As noted previously, self-efficacy (Dweck, 2000) is a dispositional quality, but not one that can be easily characterised as in the possession of some, but not other individuals. Archer (2003) asserts that the '*conditional influences'* of a local environment shapes how individuals perceive their situations, and how they choose to act in response. In this way, there is always the potential for change, whether in conditioning circumstances, or in an individual's perception of their situation, further strengthened by Lawler's view (2008) of identity and agency as both individually and collectively negotiated. Trowler (2008) also draws attention to the idea of a socio-cultural system as a pivotal feature of how change can be enacted in higher education contexts. The aim in this study was to explore how these ideas relate to the lived experience of probationary academics, and the roles that culture(s), structure(s) and agency play in the APP. One objective was to go beyond evaluative studies, where the focus is on how probationers experience the IPD demands that are commonly the only explicit demand of probationers. I was also concerned to explore how individuals articulated their transitions to academic life as a way of making sense of the anecdotes that I often hear as an educational developer with a role to play in the APP. These issues are discussed below, and feed forward into a consideration of their implications for policy and practice to be found in Chapter 8.

Key influences on academic probation

As Archer (2003) suggests, the '*conditional influences'* of the local context of an employing department exerts the most influence on probationary academics. This is no surprise, as Wenger (1998) elaborates the strength of '*communities of practice',* and similarly, Perkins' (2006) notion of an '*underlying game'* shapes academic disciplines whilst Shulman (2005) explores *'signature pedagogies'* as a way of understanding the practices of various professional disciplines in higher education settings. Cousin (2006) reminds us, however, that disciplinary territory (Becher and

Trowler, 2001) has the potential to be more contested, and this was clearly the experience for many of the participants in this study.

From their evidence, a primary concern for the probationary academics in this study is to understand and to fit in to their new working environment. Some appreciate that their role is to extend the reach of an existing department, taking teaching and research in new directions. For this reason, they knew in advance that they were unlikely to find 'like minds' in their immediate environment and that the responsibility would be theirs to build networks in other ways. In contrast, others had no reason to believe that there would not be a welcoming '*community of practice'* (Wenger, 1998) available locally for them to connect with to establish teaching and especially research relations. Where probationers sensed that they were not able quickly to establish such relations, it appeared to be a considerable source of stress.

Preparedness

Influential amongst these variable responses towards the APP appear to be four key issues. First was the extent of preparedness of the probationary academic for the new role, and whether or not they appreciated that it fell to them to extend their new department's research and teaching directions. Where this was the case, there was no underestimation that this would be difficult, but there was also a degree of expectation of support in their venture to achieve the broader spread of the department's reach. In this respect, the probationers who came into this situation were positive about the willingness of their new departments to support them, even if, in practice, this proved difficult. These probationers can be found in the resonant stance towards probation.

Readjustment

In the second case, where probationers were pathfinders in established departments, but were not aware of this element in advance, there was a period of significant readjustment as they came to terms with their new circumstances. The efforts these probationers put in to establishing new networks took a significant amount of time, and occasionally were beset by academic 'politics' or a recognition

that their specialisms would be harder to 'sell' as their departments were not particularly known in such areas. The absence of a '*community of practice'* (Wenger, 1998) was keenly felt, as it became recognised that, despite their best efforts, there was no local support for their efforts. The dissonant category contains the individuals who experienced this kind of APP.

Balance

Third, the balance between teaching and research was an issue for some, as a previous 'researcher identity' was challenged by new teaching and administrative demands. The *'social objectives'* (Archer, 2003) of the departments they joined seemed confused to these interviewees. Institutional communication made it clear: teaching was privileged, because the codified probationary demand revolved around gaining a teaching qualification. Once in post, however, where the departmental focus was on research performance (Lucas, 2006) appraisal systems belatedly made this clear, inducing a good deal of stress and uncertainty for the new lecturers who had not appreciated the relative merits of these activities. This difficulty assailed those in both resonant and dissonant categories, and one in the rejection stance.

Hostility

Lastly, some departments could be experienced as actively hostile, and perceptions of poor management exacerbated feelings of unhappiness. Institutional redirections or departmental imperatives, which often led to misapprehension by probationers, gave no indication of support for either teaching or research. It was difficult for new lecturers working under these conditions to establish any kind of '*ontological security'* (Giddens, 1984) to enable them to focus on the task in hand. The most pervasive response where local cultures were unsupportive was to dedicate time to pursuing thoughts of alternative employment, so that the new lecturers caught in this kind of 'double bind' tended not to focus on either the teaching or research functions of their roles, and these participants are most likely to be found in the dissonant and rejection categories. In this scenario, the '*contingent relations'* (Archer, 2003) were indicative of poor local socio-cultural integration.

Role models and policy environments

Beyond departmental culture(s), the next most pressing influence on probationers was professionally-significant others. In many cases, there was evidence of supportive mentoring and managerial support that encouraged the positive behaviours that Merton (1968) briefly alludes to. In these instances, which dominated the interview talk of those probationary academics in the resonant category, the self-efficacy and assertiveness of new lecturers appeared to be positively valued. Where circumstances were less supportive, the perceived threat of sanction limited probationers' desire to take the initiative in their new contexts. Professionally-significant others could be found amongst the ranks of previous colleagues, supervisors or supportive mentors, as well as from more informal sources. Key influences could also be found in departmental colleagues and mentors who demonstrated rather less interest in the probationer's career progression. Most of those in the dissonant and rejection categories could furnish instances where their attempts to exercise agency had been undermined by negative feedback from more established colleagues.

In these circumstances, it is unsurprising that the potential for '*agential reflexivity'* (Archer, 2003) becomes focused on the difficulties of establishing productive relationships, and also perhaps the motivations of specific individuals, rather than any particular substantive concern within the local environment. The wider policy agenda that Henkel (2000) refers to may be beyond the immediate apprehension of probationary academics, given their limited exposure to the workings of higher education institutions. As policies and elements of control (Henkel, 2000) shift, this introduces pressures related to compliance or contestation for those in positions of authority in departments.

Equally, the *'conditional influences'* (Archer, 2003) that are available for new academics to observe and understand their local cultures may deliberately be based on an '*audit culture'* (Strathern, 2000) designed to disempower professionals through neoliberal discourse and surveillance mechanisms (Davies and Petersen, 2005) in the hope of standardising practices. This approach may be a strategy to

overcome the sense of ‘amateurishness’ alluded to by a small number of participants in the rejection stance in this study or a systematic attempt to introduce a culture of risk-aversion (McWilliam, 2009) that is valued in a more ‘sanitised’ business model (Head, 2011) vision of academic life and work.

A final but minor influence on some of the probationary academics in this study is the nature of the relationships that they develop with their students. Most, in the resonant and dissonant categories initially held positive views of students, and wished to build productive relationships where teaching was seen as an enjoyable aspect of the academic role. As in other aspects, experiences either confirmed or undermined this intention. Sometimes, the goals of engagement and empowerment (hooks, 1994) were weakened by continuous struggles with poor student behaviour and/or immature feedback, an issue that is perhaps not always as well recognised in work that privileges student-centredness (Prosser *et al.,* 2006) but may be acknowledged obliquely in Haggis’ (2003; 2009) critiques. Most probationers in this study appreciated their contact with undergraduates, although the pastoral dimension of this role was more problematic. The more academic and industrious the student, the more pleasure new lecturers appeared to derive from their students.

Departmental cultures, professionally-significant others and, sometimes, relations with students, can therefore be seen to be the key influences on probationers. Structural influences, such as IPD and formal mentoring, seem less influential and, whilst there was some positive feedback about these elements of the APP, there was also a degree of negativity, suggesting that the required nature of such activities was felt to detract from their usefulness. This finding raises interesting issues surrounding professional development and mentoring requirements, which are discussed in the following section.

Interpreting demands: responses to academic probation

It was widely understood by the probationers in this sample that successful completion of probation required engagement in IPD related to a teaching qualification. Less clear was whether such activity could be avoided – as some did –

or needed to be completed successfully. A small number of respondents completed their teaching qualifications quickly and assumed that this would equate to successful completion of probation, which turned out not to be the case. Yet others wondered where and how their performance was monitored, if at all, whilst others felt their course was a very real enactment of managerial surveillance (Davies and Petersen, 2005).

Some interviewees expressed concerns about the generic nature of the PGCerts on offer (Comber and Walsh, 2008), feeling that some issues and priorities were being promoted that did not suit their disciplines. Applying some of the techniques and practices modelled in the course was also experienced as difficult, as the small, multi-disciplinary cohorts bore no resemblance to the *'teaching and learning regimes'* (Trowler and Cooper, 2002) they faced within their own departments. These difficulties tended to provoke two responses amongst probationers. The first was aligned to Merton's (1968) notion of conformity. As a PGCert was required activity, the new lecturers would attend and took a sometimes rather instrumental approach to assessment tasks, *'hoop, jump'* in the words of one respondent. This impression could be reinforced by the '*horror stories'* that had been passed on to them by departmental colleagues who had recently undertaken the PGCert.

A second response was to sideline the demands of the course, in the spirit of Merton's (1968) '*rebellion'*. Some officially tried to negotiate their way out of completing the qualification. Others, especially where they sensed that the course was not well thought of (Comber and Walsh, 2008) or well monitored, simply disengaged. Although there were some elements of PGCerts that were received favourably, participants' behaviours suggest a mis-match between the *'agential reflexivity'* (Archer, 2003) that probationers bring to their roles and the *'structurally shaped circumstances'* (Archer, 2003) of the PGCert which varies in relation to the institutional and personal orientations (Land, 2004) of those responsible for delivering the course.

Institutions in this study tended, officially, to provide a second source of influence for their probationers in the form of formal mentors. Where the PGCert is marginalised, the mentor could provide the necessary induction to the local practices that Trowler

and Knight (2000) advocate. In many instances, however, there was also little mention of positive mentoring experiences. In the worst cases, no mentoring was actually provided and in others, probationers thought inappropriate individuals had been assigned the role. In a limited number of cases, the relationship was felt to be used unfairly, providing feedback that undermined the probationer, or as an excuse to delegate aspects of the mentor's workload. Key difficulties with formal mentoring were the perceived lack of monitoring, or any mechanism to address unsuitable pairings. Probationers responded to unhelpful mentoring relationships most commonly by drawing on the informal support of other colleagues. Whilst this can be productive, it may be susceptible to stasis (Archer, 1995) where there is an emphasis on cultural conditioning rather than cultural elaboration (Archer, 1995).

Mentoring and PGCerts were at least recognised as formal structures in place to shape the probationary experience. Most of the other demands on new lecturers remained opaque and therefore could be a considerable source of stress. Some were aware of the distinction between having to gain research funding as a measure of probationary success, and being seen to be trying to do so. Those in the latter category were no less motivated to bring in a grant, but more sanguine about their probation being judged on this basis. Those in the former category felt that bringing money in would be used as an indicator during probation; and one respondent felt quite threatened when the issue of research funding was brought up in an annual appraisal.

Those in STEM subjects, with a stronger culture of large research grants and team-working (Becher and Trowler, 2001) were most susceptible to worry over the issue of acquiring funding. They were also more likely to be critical of a lack of support either departmentally or institutionally to assist them in developing their grant writing skills. This was especially an issue for those who had been recruited to add a new dimension to their departments and as a consequence became very frustrated at a lack of appropriate feedback on their efforts. They tried to draw more widely on their networks, but in recognising the competitive nature of funding, appreciated that seeking such advice posed difficulties of its own.

The social scientists focused more on developing productive collaborations, rather than grants, but also met frustration. The stress they felt manifested itself in criticisms of their university's workload model, which they felt did not accurately represent the actual work undertaken. The time and effort put in to building collaborations that had not yet resulted in concrete actions was felt to be ignored by workload models, and thus some probationers felt professionally embarrassed when spreadsheets were circulated which they feared would show them as 'not pulling their weight'. As with their STEM colleagues, those with immediate research expectations (which was not always the case for social scientists) were aware of the 'research game' (Lucas, 2006) imperative, but equally conscious about how difficult it was to get all the necessary tools in place.

Publications, from recently completed PhDs or post-doctoral work, were one initial goal of many probationers, given their current lack of any new research activity. They were familiar with the '*publish or perish'* maxim but again could be dismayed at workload models that counted only published papers, not those in development or submitted. This, they felt, reflected badly on their probationary prospects as the time they were investing in trying to attain publication was not being recognised. One engineer took a very strategic approach to publication, and had written a review paper for an area he wished to move into, and this had led to an invitation to write another. Others spent more time on writing and rewriting, as they came to grips with appropriate targeting of journals.

Two probationers from professionally-orientated fields felt disadvantaged by their lack of awareness of academic publishing routines and 'what counts' and they struggled to decode the '*pecking order'* (Becher and Trowler, 2001) that they perceived dominated their departments' thinking. Again there were criticisms of the expectations of their departments and how these difficulties could impact on their probationary progress, in particular a lack of support available to help them meet their publication goals. For those in the pilot study phase which was conducted as the last RAE was approaching, the implications of being designated research-inactive were not necessarily well understood, nor well-explained.

The level of publication expected was also not clear to many probationers, and in some cases was felt to be rather subjective, *'in the gift of the head of department'* as to what constituted adequate performance. This was felt not to recognise the difficulty of getting started as an independently published academic (Becker, 1986). Some departments were adopting strategies to target high-quality journals, which probationers questioned as attainable, recognising that even far more established staff had not managed to publish in such outlets. Comparing the quality and volume of published outputs for them as probationers against their more senior colleagues was felt to be an unfair practice, driven entirely by research assessment demands (Lucas, 2006) and sometimes one that ran counter to their own preferred *'social objectives'* (Archer, 2003).

In interpreting probationary demands, the privilege accorded to the high status activities of research and publication (Lucas, 2006) was quickly recognised by the new academics in this study, together with the correspondingly low status accorded to the teaching role. The need to gain a teaching qualification was seen as paradoxical for the many in this study who worked in departments which systematically devalued teaching, and left the probationers confused in how to prioritise the many demands on their time. Many enjoyed their teaching and were keen to do it well, and were disappointed at the differential status (Comber and Walsh, 2008) ascribed to teaching within their departments. Most probationers in this study held PhDs and thus felt themselves to be competent researchers; the area of academic life they felt least prepared for was teaching and they wished this element to be recognised as an equally important aspect of their role (Brew and Boud, 1996).

Summary

The convergent and divergent responses to the demands of academic probation have been discussed in this chapter in relation to the major analytic categories that emerged from the data in this study. Key influences, and those that are less

influential, have been explored with reference to the theoretical lens of critical realism and the conceptual model this framing gives rise to, shown in Figure 7.1.

Personal experiences – whether these come from interactions with colleagues or students – can be profoundly influential. If these relationships are good (as can often be seen amongst those reporting in the resonant category), the APP is often experienced benignly. Where this is less the case, shown frequently in the evidence of those in dissonant and rejection stances, the APP can be difficult to negotiate, and it is clear that many more in these latter categories do not sustain a long career in their original probationary institutions. This point is taken up again in the following chapter.

The cyclical nature of research assessment, and the level of research and publication demands within departments, also have an impact on how well probationers perceive their progress. It is the case that some new lecturers subject to the APP are unaware of the status and funding mechanisms attached to research and publication, and find limited opportunities to enhance their knowledge or understanding.

Policy and practical implications in relation to these findings are dealt with in the following chapter.

Chapter 8: Academic probation – some suggestions for policy and practice

In this concluding chapter, I draw out some implications of this study in relation to experiences of the academic probationary period. First, concerns were raised by participants about a lack of transparency surrounding the APP, giving rise to issues of consistency and equitable treatment. Second, the longitudinal approach has given an insight into participants' developing understandings of implicit probationary requirements. A consideration of these concerns has led to conclusions that have implications for institutional policies and practices regarding the APP. In the latter part of this chapter, I reflect on theory and methodology, noting the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches used. Finally, suggestions are made for further research.

The argument for transparency

One striking feature of the narratives collected in this study was the extent to which participants were unclear as to what was expected of them during the APP. Examples of this lack of clarity include: the extent to which probationers needed to engage in programmes of IPD; the need to achieve a research and publication profile; and limited understanding of how progress would be judged. These difficulties are, to a great extent, the result of opaque institutional processes perhaps related to a view of probation as simply a 'time-served' period. It is clear from the evidence presented here that institutions do have rather more sophisticated expectations for the APP; they do not, however, appear to have sound mechanisms for communicating these expectations.

Whilst Archer's (1995, 2003) critical realist framework has been extremely useful in undertaking this study, her morphogenetic cycle (outlined in chapter 2) is especially illuminative in considering the opacity surrounding the APP. The cultural and structural '*conditioning'* (Archer, 1995: 193) of probation is long-established in UK universities. As individuals enter academic life, they interact with the prevailing

social and cultural factors. Such interactions are necessarily deeply embedded and tacit, and will be highly individualised experiences. As Archer (1995) suggests, the outcome of these interactions for those involved can only be either continuity or change in the '*conditioning'* influences. For the new academics in this study, probation appears as a time-limited phenomenon with some ill-defined criteria; for this reason, the most likely outcome is continuity as individuals feel ill-equipped to influence the system they find themselves in. A change in the system was only evident from one participant in this study, whose probation had been extended. It appears that only the high-level intervention of senior colleagues that a probationary extension entails can serve the structural and cultural elaborations (Archer, 1995) required in order to change the system. As most respondents were working towards successful completion of their probations, the most common outcome was '*morphostatis'* (Archer, 1995: 157) – a continuing form of cultural reproduction that leaves the academic probationary period intact for successive recruits.

If Archer's (1995) morphogenetic cycle is a valid explanation of why the APP continues relatively unchanged, this raises some important concerns. Increasing accountability (Strathern, 2000), surveillance (Davies and Petersen, 2005) and diversification (of students – Haggis, 2003; and staff – Gordon and Whitchurch, 2010) suggest that a static conception of the APP may no longer be fit for its rather poorly-articulated purpose. Whilst it is to be expected that institutions will differ in their probationary requirements this study has identified differences within institutions, and it appears that insufficient attention has been paid to the purpose of probation. The aim in the study was to investigate experiences of probation, rather than purposes, but three suggestions potentially emerge that would be in keeping with the findings of this study:

1. Probation as an exercise in producing the '*performative subject'* (Davies and Petersen, 2005);
2. Probation as a model of enculturation to a perceived *'underlying game'* (Perkins, 2006); or
3. Probation as '*professional credentialisation'* (Gibbs and Coffey, 2004).

It is by no means clear which, if any, of these positions the institutions represented in this study actually adopt in practice. I would speculate, however, that an unproblematised conflation of all three purposes is at work. Without a clearer articulation of what is expected, it is suggested here that successful completion of the APP is a local, rather than institutional enactment – an example of '*street-level bureaucracy'* (Lipsky, 1980) – where vague or indecisive criteria are differentially interpreted and discretionary power is delegated to the street level. This gives rise to the concerns of equity – in terms of workload allocation or participation in other potential opportunities – and consistency of treatment of probationary academics that are in evidence in this study.

The major implication for policy derived from this conclusion is that institutions should be invited to consider, in a serious way, what exactly constitutes the requirements of the APP, and their expectations of it, to suit their local purposes. This would then need to be communicated clearly to those who assess performance, and to those subject to its demands, so that there can be confidence within an institution that equitable and consistent practices ensue. In this regard, within an overall institutional framework, the cultural dimension of probation needs to be recognised. Interpretation should be clarified at the level of the '*disciplinary tribe'* (Becher and Trowler, 2001) to take into account different, discipline-specific teaching, research and publication patterns.

In terms of academic practice, there is a clear need to ensure that the structural requirements of the APP, such as participating in IPD, are also considered. There is evidence in this study that PGCerts can be inflexible, with requirements that do not necessarily sit well with the activities that some new academics undertake. For example, as Kahn *et al.* (2008) suggest, some programmes of initial professional development privilege a '*reflective practice'* (Schon, 1984) stance that can prove challenging to probationers who have limited teaching duties. It is especially the case in post-1992 institutions, where a one-year academic probationary period is common, that PGCerts make demands of probationers in terms of reflections that they have not yet experienced in practice.

A further structural practice that is both common, and not well-executed according to the participants in this study, is the process of allocating a formal mentor to those undergoing the academic probationary period. Whilst mentoring can be an invaluable source of help and support, it appears to be a practice that is managed so informally as to cause probationers as many difficulties as it resolves. A small number of the new academics in this study reported mentoring experiences that reflect the idea of being inducted into a *'community of practice'* (Wenger, 1998) where there was a clear trajectory from *'legitimate peripheral participation'* to recognised community membership (Jawitz, 2009a) during the APP. For others, however, the institutional requirement to appoint a mentor appeared to lead to instrumental decisions that took no account of the personalities, responsibilities or circumstances involved.

The actual practice of mentoring in the lives of probationary academics thus appears to be a requirement that is routinely discharged in the service of following bureaucratic protocol, rather than a process that serves probationers' development needs. As Macfarlane (2007) suggests, the concept of '*service'* in academic life has been marginalised. It might then be reasonable to propose that professional mentoring is perceived to be a service activity (Macfarlane, 2007) that carries sufficient weight in the '*audit culture'* regime (Strathern, 2000) to be undertaken seriously and discharged effectively. On the evidence presented here, it would seem that most institutions do not have an effective mechanism to monitor and address difficulties in the mentoring process. In this respect, it is recommended that where institutions make formal mentoring part of their probationary demands, they also develop a mechanism whereby the process can be monitored and amended as necessary, in order that all new academics have access to supportive colleagues to advise on their progress, including those who may not have ready access to extant academic cultures because of their positioning in relation to dominant groups – such as the young, female or ethnic minorities that Archer (2008a and b) researched.

Following Archer's (2000) concern for not over- or under-specifying the role of agency, this section of the chapter has focused on the cultural and structural factors that exert '*conditioning influences'* (1995: 193) on new academics. Next, I turn to the

agentic dimension of the narratives collected during this study, to illustrate how this particular aspect of the study shows the ways in which the APP can be experienced.

The underlying game

As noted in the preceding chapters, biographies, personal expectations and emotions influence the experiences of the APP, the latter sometimes displacing rational approaches to navigating probationary requirements. Whilst cultural and structural factors have a role to play as new academics become inducted to academic life, those subject to such requirements also actively construct and deploy their '*agential reflexivity'* (Archer, 2003) in response to their circumstances. Perkins (2006) suggests an '*underlying game'* can be in operation in situations of learning. He refers directly to *'tacit presumptions'* that, as demonstrated in the previous section, may have a direct impact on how individuals perceive a given situation.

Three areas in particular seem to characterise the potential for exercising agency amongst the new lecturers who were part of this study, and these are:

1. A feeling of operating in a 'feedback vacuum' for a prolonged period;
2. Limited experience of setting realistic benchmarks, leading to unhelpful comparisons with more established colleagues; and
3. The 'cohort effect' of participating in a PGCert which brings to the surface very different views of probationary expectations.

These specific issues have received very little attention in higher education literature, although they may be recognised as components of the phenomenon recognised as 'impostor syndrome' (a term coined by Clance and Imes, 1978) where an individual's confidence in their professional role is insecure. The degree of self-efficacy (Dweck, 2000) displayed by participants in this study clearly varied. However, all participants reported instances of self-doubt and many related this directly to a lack of feedback on aspects of performance. In the context of undergraduate students, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) encourage dialogue and negotiation around feedback as a means to enhance task understanding and good

performance. There is little evidence in this study, however, that much attention is paid by heads of department, mentors or other established academics to developing effective feedback mechanisms that will benefit those on probation. This contrasts with the '*communities of practice'* (Wenger, 1998) view where learning and development to engage in greater levels of community participation are assumed.

Where informal opportunities to gain feedback are limited, those undertaking the APP are most likely to look to immediately available role models, such as the most senior and/or admired academics in their department or field. This can lead to further insecurities as the benchmarks for (especially publication) performance are unrealistic, although occasionally such comparisons can be seen as aspirational and inspirational. As many institutions appear reluctant to provide concrete guidance on matters of research and publication performance (Lucas, 2006), probationary academics can find it hard to set for themselves what could be considered realistic benchmarks. As they juggle a whole new set of competing demands (Davies and Petersen, 2005), new lecturers can be particularly prone to sensitivity towards perceived conflicting institutional priorities (Trowler, 1998).

Frequently, it seems, the only probationary demand that is made explicit is participation in a PGCert, and many lecturers undertaking the APP labour for some months under the impression that completing their teaching qualification is sufficient evidence of progress to warrant completion of probation. It appears that for many in this study, the first appraisal meeting is where the importance of the '*underlying game'* (Perkins, 2006) of research and publication profile becomes apparent (and for a small minority, sadly, this realisation can occur much later, leading to unfortunate consequences). The initial focus on demonstrating, at least, competence in teaching – and many aspire to do more than be judged as 'competent' – may thus be sidelined as a perception of greater value attached to research (Lucas, 2006) becomes apparent.

The cyclical nature of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE 2008) exerts an influence on institutional demands, and although it is clear from the data that some probationary academics are familiar with this process, many (including a good number of the international academics in the sample) are not. Institutional and

disciplinary benchmarks for RAE submissions therefore become yet another tacit indicator of probationary performance. This led, in one instance in the pilot study, to a probationer being deemed research inactive where the implications of such a designation were not fully understood. It is not possible to ascertain whether the ramifications of this designation played a role in her decision to leave UK higher education, or whether the move was more attributable to wider changes within the HE system (Watson, 2010; Trowler, 2008), declining morale (Watson, 2009), a personal search for a more '*authentic'* academic identity (Archer, 2008b) or other reasons.

Whatever the motivations behind the particular case referred to above, it remains the case that one quarter of the sample had left their original probationary post by February 2011, between 15 months and three and a half years (at the absolute maximum) after being interviewed for this study. This suggests that, if such a pattern were to prove typical elsewhere, probation may be a costly exercise – in the broadest sense of that term – that could benefit from an examination of institutional policies and practices that are intended to support probationary academics. Chief amongst such institutional demands in the UK post-Dearing (1997) is the PGCert, and this can be a further source of conflict for early-career academics.

Some probationary academics welcomed the opportunity to gain a professionally-recognised teaching qualification as part of their probationary requirements, and participated willingly and enthusiastically in the courses on offer. Yet others appreciated the provision of IPD, even if they could not yet relate what was taught to their more limited teaching duties. For others, however, the IPD provision was felt to be an imposition. Comber and Walsh (2008) explored views of PGCerts institution-wide, extending the usual remit of evaluative work (Warnes, 2008; Donnelly, 2006) and found that the views of professionally-significant others influenced participants. This finding is supported by some evidence in this study where probationers suggested that their departmental colleagues' (negative) views had influenced their perceptions before starting the PGCert.

The negative views from colleagues were sometimes, but not always, found to be unwarranted. A further issue arose, however, from the multi-disciplinary intakes of

the PGCert that goes beyond Comber and Walsh's (2008) investigation into participants' perceptions of generic versus discipline-specific teaching concerns, and this is what I have termed the 'cohort effect'. Before institutionally provided IPD became a regular feature of probationary requirements (approximately 1997 in pre-1992 universities, who responded to the Dearing agenda; the early 1990s for post-1992 institutions that embraced the teacher-accreditation agenda earlier), induction would, probably, have proceeded along the departmental locus-of-control approach that Trowler and Knight (2000) advocate. It is not possible to be sure; the lack of work using academic probation as a frame of reference makes comparative studies impossible and, therefore, assertions very subjective. Whether probationary circumstances have improved, worsened or stayed the same can only be a matter of speculation.

Communication of demands and expectations of the APP can thus be seen to vary widely, and can perhaps best be conceptualised as ad-hoc and dependent on the ways in which professionally-significant others (Heads of Department, mentors) carry out their roles. This clearly has the potential to disadvantage – and in some cases, undermine – some probationers. One implication is clear here: it is simply not enough to have institutional policies relating to teaching remission and mentoring. These policies need to be implemented fairly and consistently in order that every new academic has the opportunity to realise their aspirations. It is also reasonable to suggest that institutions make further efforts to communicate more clearly wider systemic policy drivers (such as research assessment) that play a role in judgments of probationary success as it cannot be assumed that all new academics will be equally familiar with such demands.

It is also suggested that institutions can usefully carry out internal research to determine the extent of the variability of probationary requirements and practices that actually operate within a single HEI. The 'cohort effect' brings to the surface disparities in practices (teaching loads, mentoring, etc) for those subject to the APP. These individuals, however, are – and perceive themselves to be – the least powerful members of their departmental and institutional communities. For this reason, Archer's (1995) '*morphostatis'* remains the dominant model of academic probation. This ensures that '*cultural reproduction'* (Archer, 1995) – an enculturation

to Perkins' (2006) '*underlying game'* – is the outcome of the APP, rather than transformation. This approach would not seem to sit well with universities that extol excellence and change in the face of wider systemic policies (Henkel, 2000; Trowler, 1998; 2008; Head, 2011).

Providing solutions to these issues is an area that could usefully fall to the remit of educational development units, whose independent '*brokering'* role (Land, 2004) could be further exploited in support of probationary academics. It is acknowledged that educational development units often already do this work informally, amongst a wide range of other activities (Gosling, 1996; 2001), but also that frequently, they work at the margins of an institution, as a hybrid, 'third-space' activity (Gordon and Whitchurch, 2010). As Comber and Walsh (2008) and Land (2008) suggest, there is often friction between what educational developers do, and what disciplinary academics (and their departments) value; however, an independent educational development function could, perhaps, do more to mediate the experiences of probationary academics in line with more clearly articulated strategic priorities to ensure, as noted above, that the costs of unsuccessful probation or high staff turnover ratios are avoided.

What is clear is that greater transparency, and in some cases, more robust institutional policies and practices, are needed in relation to the APP. These factors have been highlighted repeatedly in the longitudinal approach adopted in this study. It is to issues of theoretical and methodological reflection that I turn in the following section to try to establish a degree of confidence in these findings.

Theoretical and methodological reflections

Adopting the theoretical lens of critical realism (Archer, 1995; 2003, Sayer, 2000) has proved to be generative in framing experiences of the academic probationary period. In particular, the '*stratified ontology'* that Sayer (2000) expounds, and the strong arguments that Archer (1996) makes to avoid '*conflation'* have enabled me to consider the strengths of different influences at work during the APP by separating

out narratives concerned with departmental and academic cultures, structures and the potential for agency amongst probationary academics. I suggest that this study has thus been well-placed to explore this range of influences in ways that go beyond the dichotomy posed in Chapter 1 of the parallel literatures of educational development, with its concern for evaluating its own practices, and that of sociologists of higher education, where the focus tends towards community, identity and belonging.

A possible weakness in this argument is that I am not a sociologist, and have appropriated the critical realist framework to shape, frame and interpret data, and that other sociological theories have not been explored further in this account. I would maintain, however, that looking at the APP in this way has provided some insights that are useful in interpreting attitudes and behaviours that are displayed by probationary academics. I hope this study is perceived as illuminative, as is the aim of many ethnographic studies (Van Maanen, 1988). Even if it does not qualify as ethnography in its truest sense (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995), it offers a way, perhaps, given my positioning as an educational developer, of exploring further the anecdotes that surround the APP.

Above all, however, I am keen to stress that this work should not be read as definitive. Archer's (2003) '*social objectives'* caution that it is an individual's reading of circumstances that shapes behaviours. Whatever policies and practices may be implemented by an institution, therefore, are liable to re-interpretation. It is acknowledged that this work draws on a limited sample at specific moments in time, and that probationary practices vary widely both within and between institutions. A different sample, taken at a different point in the context of ever-changing policy cycles (Trowler, 2008) may have provided different narratives (Clough, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1995). The individuals in this study frequently recognised this contingency themselves, by suggesting that their narratives may have been different if they had been collected at different times, such is the nature of the rhythms of an academic year.

The longitudinal aspect of this study remains a rarity in higher education research although Archer (2008 and b), Sadler (2008) and Sutherland (2010) have previously

adopted such a technique. This approach contrasts with the more common single-point sampling such as Prosser *et al.,* (2006), and gives some insight to learning, development and change over time, as new academics come to appreciate both cultural and structural factors (Archer, 1995) and their potential for agency, as they seek to establish their '*principled, personal autonomy'* (Clegg, 2008). The '*analysis of narratives'* (Polkinghorne, 1995) presented here represents the *'tales of the field'* that Van Maanen (1988) suggests can be insightful, deeply contextualised (Clough, 2002) and, I hope, useful chronologies (Cresswell, 2007) that both illustrate and illuminate the process of becoming an academic by situating this study's participants in the wider field of understanding the academic probationary period.

Conclusion

Two key areas have emerged from the analysis of data collected in this study with regard to the academic probationary period. The first concerns the poorly-articulated purpose(s) that academic probation is meant to serve. The second revolves around 'agentic uncertainty'. First, there are demands on new academics in relation to cultural and structural factors that are not transparent to those subject to such demands, and responses to these conditions can be unduly influenced by the roles and expectations of professionally-significant others. Second, the potential for agency, and how this is interpreted and exercised by individuals, also plays a significant role in the experiences of, and responses to, the academic probationary period.

A tripartite model of experiences of probation has been presented that puts the APP at the heart of a conceptual model, and begins to explore the factors that influence transitions to academic life. In this respect, it is claimed that this study represents an exploration of academic probation that is currently under-represented in higher education literature, but fundamental to how we begin to conceptualise the role and purpose of probation in academic life. Three potentially conflicting purposes of probation have been considered in this chapter, along with three perceptions of experience:

1. Probation as ‘performance’, where a ‘feedback vacuum’ can have profound influence on the desired performance;
2. Probation as ‘enculturation’, where realistic role models and benchmarks may either be available and exploited, or inaccessible; and
3. Probation as a ‘credentialising’ exercise that can surface either reassuring or undermining processes.

In the first case, there can be a mismatch between the espoused values and practices of an institution and those of an individual, who may bring with them a particular ideological position in relation to higher education. In the second, again espoused and implicit values may clash and this can have particular resonance with those changing disciplines or national cultures. The third proposition explicitly values an IPD agenda – that may, or may not, be similarly recognised in home departments.

The ‘feedback vacuum’ illustrated by much of the data in this study is clearly a significant issue in the experiences of, and responses to, the academic probationary period. It also appears, in many cases, to represent inequitable practices that are not well-defined or monitored, despite institutional policies. The ‘enculturation’ view also clearly relies on the availability of local expertise, which has the benefit of the discipline-specific induction that Trowler and Knight (2000) advocate, which can also be critiqued as concentrating power in the hands of a limited number of powerful gatekeepers. The third and final concern, of probation as ‘credentialisation’ (Gibbs and Coffey, 2004) perhaps reflects the view of early-career academics who have institutional IPD requirements that privilege teaching qualifications. The evidence in this study shows this view to be the most explicit understanding of the APP but one that is often at odds with institutional missions; this can work to the detriment of new academics who discover that their time has been spent working towards ‘wrong’ priorities.

Adopting a more strategic stance, as Clegg (2009) advocates, may be a useful position for educational developers to adopt, in order to enable the variability in practices documented in this thesis to become more standardised. It is not suggested that a ‘one size fits all’ regime be adopted; the situation under study is

clearly more nuanced and requires local solutions. However, it is suggested that practices should be transparent and consistent within institutions, to enable those subject to the APP to have confidence that the activities they undertake give them the best opportunity to realise both their, and their department's, aspirations for successful academic practice. In this respect, it is acknowledged that this study is subject to the limitations of times, places and an opportunistic sampling regime. In the final section of this chapter, some suggestions for further research are outlined, to build on the findings presented here.

Suggestions for further research

The most pressing problem highlighted by this study is a lack of any conceptual grounding of the nature and purpose of probation in the UK HE context. Whilst a conceptual model has been presented, this should be seen as a starting point, rather than closure. For as long as probation is seen as a temporal mechanism at the start of an academic career, it is likely to be the case that experiences vary, not all of which will be conducive to good academic practices. Research drawing on a wider population that specifically interrogates the nature and purpose(s) of probation would be useful to the higher education research community.

Allied to an investigation into the purpose(s) that probation should serve, is the need for more systematic research by institutions into the procedures, practices and outcomes for their probationary academics. In this regard, a large-scale quantitative study, drawing on some of the factors identified in this study, may be appropriate to augment HESA statistics. This approach, whilst unlikely to reveal the lived experience of probation, may give some insight into the career trajectories of new academic staff and their longevity in academic life. Any such study should draw on the major weakness of this work: a lack of follow-up strategy to give insight as to what factors may prompt new academics to move on quickly from their probationary institutions.

Related to the institutional research proposed above, it is also noted that a quarter of the voluntaristic sample captured by this study had moved on to other

employment within a relatively short timescale. This suggests that institutions are investing a significant degree of resource, especially where the opportunity cost of demanding participation in a formal programme of IPD supplants time spent on research activity, with little recognition of the outcomes of such investment. The 'cost' (in the broadest sense) of probation is clearly not apparent to many institutions and is an issue that both HEIs and their educational development functions may wish to investigate further.

It is also the case that higher education is subject to various rapidly-changing policy contexts. Within the timeframe of this study, the Higher Education Academy has begun consultation on the nature of the Professional Standards Framework, the criteria for inclusion in the Research Excellence Framework have begun to be shaped, and the Browne Review (2010) has reported, leading to discrepancies between the UK nations' approaches to the funding of higher education. Whilst all of these policies may have an effect on the APP, the latter is most likely to lead to divergent practices in the recruitment and retention of academic staff. Potential concerns, already discerned in this study, may become more of a focus, such as:

- The changing nature of staff-student relationships as the already articulated distinction between student as 'raw material' and student as 'consumer' becomes more clearly defined;
- IPD becoming a greater institutional concern, if moves to make this measure indicative of the quality of teaching become more widespread and recognised as a way of justifying higher fees; and
- A potential shift in the balance of research and teaching, and the claims that institutions can make, in order to keep themselves viable in relation to the 'market' demands of the Browne Review (2010).

Other specific issues, that were not the focus of this investigation, can also be discerned from the findings. These too, merit further exploration. In claiming that probation is little used as a frame of reference for higher education research, clearly, there are many further avenues that can be exploited.

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Appendix 1: Participant Information and Consent Form

Dear colleague,

I am undertaking a small-scale research study into the experiences of staff new to the academic role. Volunteers for this study are asked to commit to three face-to-face interviews over one academic year during their probationary period.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the study, which has ethical approval from the University of Strathclyde. I wish to tape record the interviews for later transcription. All interviews will be strictly confidential, with findings reported anonymously.

It is not my intention that any participant feels stressed by this process. If, in the course of interviews, you are uncomfortable with any of the questions asked, please decline to answer. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time – simply contact me to say that you wish to take no further part. It is anticipated that all data collected during the course of this study will be retained for a period of two years following successful completion of the PhD. If you require any further information about the study at any time, again, please contact me on the details below.

Once again, thank you for your time. I would now be grateful if you could sign and date the declaration below to show that you have given your informed consent to take part in this study.

Date:

Signature:

Contact details for further information:

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Appendix 2: Interview Prompts

First Interview

Interview 1 schedule v2, August 2006.

What are the important influences in how new lecturers come to understand their role as academics?

Q1: Brief biographic and demographic details: subject area, date of appointment, general and recent background.

Q2: Can you tell me:

a) anything you like/are looking forward to in your new role?
b) anything you don't like/are not looking forward to in your new role?

Q3: Can you describe what you think the academic role is?

Q4: What do you think might be the difficulties for academics?

a) If none, then ask about teaching, assessment, research assessment etc.

Q5: What avenues of support are open to you?

a) Which of these appeal?
b) If none, what do you think would be helpful?

Q6: Have you found anything unexpected? Familiar? Comforting? Discomfiting?

Q7: Why did you choose this role?

Q8: What do you aspire to in academic life?

Q9: Is there someone in academic life who you admire?

a) If yes, what is it about them that you admire?
b) If no, would you like to have someone to model your practice on?

Q10: Anything I haven't asked that you would like to comment on?

Second Interview

Interview schedule v2 (mid-point of 3 ints), February 2007

What are the important influences in how new lecturers come to understand their role as academics?

Q1. How have things been this semester?

Q2. Is this different from last year? In what way? Better/worse?

Q3. What do you think you learned about your role in your first semester?

Q4. What was most useful? Least useful?

Q5. What have you learned about your department?

Q6. Can you describe for me what you think the academic role is?

Q7. Anything I haven't asked but that you feel is important?

Final Interview

Interview schedule v3 (end of year) June 2007

What are the important influences in how new lecturers come to understand their role as academics?

Q1: Can you tell me if you're aware of any changes in your practice compared to when you started the year?

Q2: Can you tell me if you're aware of any changes in your attitude or opinions compared to when you started?

Q3: Have there been any significant moments this year that have led you to thinking differently about the academic role?

Q4: What do you aspire to now in academic life?

Q5: What has been the best thing about the year? The worst?

Q6: If you were asked to give advice to someone new, what would you tell them

a) about surviving their 1st year
b) about how to get on in their career

Q7: Anything I haven't asked that's important?

Appendix 3: Transcript Coding Scheme

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Culture</td><td>Institutional</td></tr>
<tr><td>Departmental
Management issues</td></tr>
<tr><td>Disciplinary</td></tr>
<tr><td>Networks & Communities</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Structure</td><td>Probation</td></tr>
<tr><td>Professional Development
Formal mentoring</td></tr>
<tr><td>Other Academic Expectations –
Teaching
Research
Publishing
Administration</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Agency</td><td>Significant others, incl Informal Mentoring</td></tr>
<tr><td>Feelings & language</td></tr>
<tr><td>Work-life balance</td></tr>
</table>

Appendix 4: Coded Extract of Transcript Data

D: I really like the security of having an academic post, even when things have been difficult I've reminded myself that I'm very lucky to have a permanent post and it's much more desirable than the hourly-paid teaching so that's the thing I really like. I think the second thing is it's nice to choose my teaching in a way and the job here they've been quite flexible in what subjects I could choose to teach so my 3rd year course is [subject] which is my interest as in my PhD [laughs] you'd never guess [laughs]

F[4]

T

J: [removed, identifying]

D: [removed, identifying]

J: So you've been able to continue that on with your teaching?

D: Yeah, so that's been a nice thing.

J: And the other side of that is if there's anything you don't like or are not enjoying?

D: Um, it's been an interesting process, I think, perhaps I could say a bit more about my academic background because I think it has influenced the way I've responded. When I was doing my PhD I was also teaching, obviously not teaching full time but it was quite a lot of teaching in a way, I started teaching in the 2nd week of the PhD, somewhat amazingly, and then I was undergraduate tutor and I also taught a first year [course] um, and when I came back to the UK I was doing hourly-paid teaching at [university] on a Master's course, at [another university] on a 2nd year course and at [another university] as a tutor [all at the same time?] all at the same time, yeah, and I had to finish my PhD as well so it was quite a busy time but then I taught at [university] for a second year and then I did the post-doc and [they] were quite good at being inclusive, you know I'd go to the department meetings, they had all these study groups and you really felt a part of the department so I think when I came to applying for jobs I felt like an academic in a way, I didn't feel, I didn't approach a permanent lectureship with, I didn't really approach it with much trepidation, I kind of thought, well this is everything, all of my experience has led up to this, um…

T

Dept

F

J: And you'd experienced various bits of the role, you weren't coming new to it.

[4] See Appendix 3 for full coding scheme. Items coded in blue represent cultural factors (in this case, institution and department). Those in pink denote structural factors: probation and professional development. Yellow signifies agentic aspects, in this case, thoughts and feelings.

D: Yeah, and I had quite specific ideas about teaching as well because something that quite interests me is different styles of teaching and how you can encourage genuine learning and [country] was quite a good environment in that in order to develop that because you were teaching quite diverse groups, people from all sorts of backgrounds. T

J: Did you have very big classes?

D: They have relatively small tutor groups but they have big course groups so my 1st year group I was teaching 270 people but then there was a team of a kind of tutors who would take the individual tutorials but you'd also, you'd be teaching 4 lectures a week as well, it wasn't the sort of one you have here so it was a lot of teaching but I suppose it meant that I came to the job feeling as though I could do it and I did the interview here, it was quite a tough interview, I'd done 2 before that and had to do a presentation to the department, answer questions, we stayed overnight and had to meet people in the morning and had this lunch which just, I think it was the prospect of meeting people and having the lunch that was the most terrifying thing beforehand [laughs]. And I got through that the first day and then went back to this hotel and had the interview and it was quite a grilling interview and then they offered me the job so I felt I'd kind of been put through the works if you like and I'd got the job and I think I turned up and I think it was obviously, it was like any new job in some ways that it was an area that I didn't know, I didn't really know where [town] was before I'd come for the interview, I'd quite liked living in [city] and had lots of friends there so I think that was a difficult dynamic and I think the nature of the university is that staff don't tend to live [here] so it's quite difficult to sort of go for drinks after work and build up a social life so there's that kind of element of a new job that one would have anywhere. T F Dept F Dept F Inst F

J: Yeah, new city, no friends locally, it's a daunting prospect leaving everything behind.

D: [laughs] yeah, but you must let me know if I'm wandering off the topic you want to talk about, but in terms of the probationary experience I think the single most difficult thing I've encountered is the actual probationary process and the kind of attitude I felt the professional development centre have had towards probationary lecturers and the way in which the tension between being, them being supportive and them being quite disciplinary and quite threatening [right] and I had a real sense from early on that they were being more disciplinary than supportive and I thought a long time about the way I was responding to it because it was quite a, err, I was feeling quite aggressive, I wasn't being aggressive towards it but I felt they were almost treating me like this blank piece of paper and in the initial interview I had with my probationary, the probation person in professional development, P/PD F P/PD