

*Understanding the nature and experiences of  
work and employment within the context of  
public sector reforms in professional work*

*Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of*

*Doctor of Philosophy*

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## *Declaration of Authenticity*

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Signed: Eva Jendro

Date: 31/10/2021

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## *Abstract*

The thesis provides a broad examination of the dynamics of public sector reform under austerity and working conditions in the context of professional values. A multilevel framework for understanding influences on, and dynamics in, professional experiences of work and employment in public service subject to neoliberal reform is proposed. Social influences, namely professional values and identities, are seen as central to understanding evaluations of job characteristics within this context. The framework accounts for the particular nature of employment relations in public service which are characterised by tensions in the competing interests of the neoliberal state as employer/reformer and the professions working within them as well as their representation by trade unions.

Across two empirical case studies in the Scottish context, namely Further Education colleges and Fire and Rescue Services, drawing on qualitative methods, the following are explored: (1) macro-level reform and the connected fiscal policy context in which public sector work and employment are embedded; (2) profession-level influences (professional values as encapsulated in shared identities); (3) two sets of working conditions relating to characteristics of work and employment; and (4) individual experiences of this interdynamic of influences. This has supported a reconceptualisation of the social dimensions of work, and in particular of additional sources of intensity in work, which in this research were revealed through the lens of professional values. The multidimensional nature of social characteristics of professional jobs in public service, including the importance of prosocial job characteristics within this context, is emphasised.

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## *Abbreviations*

5WDS/5GDS – 5 Watch/Group Duty System

AED – Automatic External Defibrillator

AM – Area Manager

DCLG – Department for Communities and Local Government

EIS – Educational Institute Scotland

ER – Employment Relations

EU – European Union

FBU – Fire Brigades Union

FE – Further Education

FELA – Further Education Lecturers' Association

FF – Firefighter

FG – Focus Group

FRS – Fire and Rescue Service

FTE – Full-time Equivalent

GFC – Great Financial Crisis

HE – Higher Education

HFSV – Home Fire Safety Visit

HNC – Higher National Certificate

HND – Higher National Diploma

HRM – Human Resource Management

IMF – International Monetary Fund

IR – Industrial Relations

JD-R – Job Demands-Resources

KI – Key Informant

KPI – Key Performance Indicator

LA – Local Authority

LSO – Local Senior Officer

NJC – National Joint Council

NJNC – National Joint Negotiating Committee

NPM – New Public Management

OB – Organisational Behaviour

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OHCA – Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest

ONS – Office for National Statistics

PI – Performance Indicator

RDS – Retained Duty System

SCQF – Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

SDA – Service Delivery Area

SFC – Scottish Funding Council

SFRS – Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

SNP – Scottish National Party

SQA – Scottish Qualifications Authority

STF – Slips, Trips and Falls

UK – United Kingdom

VS – Voluntary severance

WT – wholetime

## *Chapter 1. Introduction*

The thesis engages with what has been described as an increasing ‘psychologisation of industrial/employment relations (I/ER)’ (Godard, 2014). Work psychology’s occupational health and work design models have traditionally contributed to debates in the field of employment relations, such as those concerned with job quality, especially where individual wellbeing outcomes of jobs are a key concern (Boxall, Huo and Winterton, 2019; Boxall, 2021). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, as a currently highly popular work design and occupational health model (Lesener, Gusy and Wolter, 2019), has been cited as exemplifying the influence of psychological theories on the field of Human Resource Management (HRM) (Boxall, 2021), a field which shares much proximity to that of ER (Townsend *et al.*, 2019). While this in itself would not evidence any psychologisation of the field of ER and, by virtue of this, industrial relations overall, a potential issue from the traditionally pluralist IR point of view can stem from an uncritical adoption of such models. For IR scholars, the assumption of unitarism embedded in work psychology’s theories and research agendas is problematic (Bal and Dóci, 2018). Inherently individualistic and largely acontextual theories and methodologies pose limitations, of which broader fields seeking to draw on such research need to be cognisant (Harley, 2015). These are key concerns to those scholars cautioning against a ‘psychologisation’ of the field (Godard, 2014). Although deemed a useful conceptual framework from an ER perspective, for such purposes the JD-R model has been argued to necessitate theoretical supplementation and refinement (Boxall, 2021).

The thesis thus seeks to explore the extent to which work-psychological models can be adapted to build on their popularity, while addressing some of the limitations associated with such models in supplementing their scope and framing, to suit a study more broadly anchored in the pluralist tradition of the field of ER. The rationale for this rests on the potential of work design and

occupational health models to reflect interdynamic relations between characteristics of work and employment, as well as offering a useful categorisation of these characteristics that can be cognisant of their social meaning; for example by taking into account the relevance of values (Semmer and Beehr, 2013; Schaufeli and Taris, 2014; Rattrie, Kittler and Paul, 2020). This resonates with wider social science literatures which have emphasised the need for research to reflect on how social context influences the (perceived) obtainability, individual evaluations and experiences of the characteristics of work and employment (Atkinson, 2010; Brown, Charlwood and Spencer, 2012; Hebson, Rubery and Grimshaw, 2015). This is further explored in Section 1.1.

The thesis develops a contextualised adaptation of the JD-R conceptual framing as a work design model which, at the time of writing, is influential beyond its core discipline. This incorporates austerity measures and neoliberal public sector reform as exemplifying change in a macro-level context alongside meso-level institutions (professionalism). Such context is pertinent to understanding experiences of job characteristics and their individual outcomes. The thesis thus provides an examination of the role played by occupational context in shaping experiences of public sector work and employment in the light of reforms under expansionary austerity. Specifically, the relevance of professional values to experiences of working conditions, public sector reform-driven changes therein, and individual outcomes, are explored. The rationale for selecting a public sector contextual framing is further detailed in Section 1.2. The final part of this introductory chapter (Section 1.3.) presents the thesis' objectives, research questions and gives an overview of its structure.



## 1.1. Evaluating the contribution of concepts from Work Psychology and Employment Relations for understanding individual experiences of work and employment

Occupational health and work design models, such as the JD-R model, provide useful analytic conceptual frameworks for understanding individual experiences of work and employment (through the lens of job characteristics and associated psychological states) (e.g. Holman and McClelland, 2011; Bailey *et al.*, 2017). The JD-R model could be argued to illustrate the influence and relevance of psychosocial perspectives beyond the disciplinary boundaries of Work Psychology (WP) and Organisational Behaviour (OB); across ER/HRM (Boxall, 2021) and wider job quality debates (see, for instance, Holman, 2013; OECD, 2013; Eurofound, 2017, p. 36, 2019). Though this is not necessarily problematic in itself, as scholars point out, as a field of study rather than a pure discipline, Industrial Relations (alongside wider job quality debates) has traditionally been based in multidisciplinary perspectives (Troth and Guest, 2019; Sisson, 2020). The concern with the 'psychologisation of I/ER' resides in the implications of a traditionally multidisciplinary field becoming narrowly focused on research from within a single discipline (Harley, 2015) - Work Psychology - and not with psychological research, or the disciplines' contributions to understanding individuals at work *per se* (Godard, 2014; Townsend *et al.*, 2019; Budd, 2020; Kaufman, 2020). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to ascertain whether indeed a psychologisation of IR has taken place, not least as far as evaluations of the quality and experiences of work and employment are concerned, or whether the prominence of psychosocial models across these debates and literatures has remained stable. With this considered, the JD-R model was selected as a basis for the thesis' conceptual framing for three reasons.

First, the model's significant popularity at the time of writing (Lesener, Gusy and Wolter, 2019), to also be noted in wider job quality literatures (e.g. Holman, 2013; OECD, 2013; Eurofound, 2017, p. 36) warrants engagement with the limitations inherent to such psychological models from ER's pluralist perspective, but also their utility (Boxall, 2021). Second, the JD-R model synthesizes key conceptual propositions of prior work design, occupational health and (job) stress literatures (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014, 2017) and thus brings together a breadth of psychology's conceptual ideas embodying, from an IR-perspective, a variety of potential issues therein. Third, the model is expressly rooted in a unitarist view of the employment relationship (cf. Bakker, Albrecht and Leiter, 2011b; Bal and Dóci, 2018) and originates from a research approach which leans toward methodological individualism, favouring within-person explanations and thus tending to neglect the wider social phenomena necessary to build a fuller understanding of experiences of work and employment in research. The model could hence be argued as exemplifying some of the key concerns expressed by IR scholars regarding a 'psychologisation' of the field (Godard, 2014; Harley, 2015; Kaufman, 2020).

In the light of these concerns, the thesis seeks to explore the extent to which psychosocial work design models can be supplemented and extended, drawing on literatures from beyond work psychology (and mainstream OB). It attempts to offer an interdisciplinary adaptation of such a model that is building on their popularity, whilst offering a more pluralistic, contextualised view of the employment relations, in which the jobs and individuals psychosocial models seek to understand are ultimately embedded (Jenkins, 2019; Troth and Guest, 2019; Budd, 2020; Kaufman, 2020).

To this end, some re-conceptualisation and broadening of the focus of psychosocial work design models is required, as described below.

Firstly, influences on (experiences of) the characteristics of work and employment residing in the wider context, beyond the level of the organisation, need to be considered (Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman,

2017; Dierdorff, 2019; van Veldhoven *et al.*, 2020), such as economic and institutional contexts.

Secondly, the adaptation of such a model needs to be sensitive to the nature of the employment relationship as characterised by a 'structured antagonism' (Edwards, 1990). As such, it must attend to a dynamic between conflicting and shared interests which encompasses areas of cooperation, but also gives rise to worker resistance and attempts to assert control through various mechanisms by both employers and workers (Harley, 2019). The example of public sector employment illustrates such tensions. Here, these reside between the state as employer/reformer, occupations situated within the public sector and their collective interest representation institutions, such as trade unions or professional associations. These have yet maintained a stronger presence in the public compared to the private sector (European Commission, 2013; van Wanrooy *et al.*, 2013a). However, potential areas of interest alignment, and of cooperation, may also exist (or evolve) between public employers and public service occupations, such as prosocial aspects of work (Olakivi and Niska, 2017; Wright, Irving and Selvan Thevatas, 2020). The thesis proposes an initial starting point for how work design and occupational health models may be adapted to provide a pluralistic, interdisciplinary framework for evaluating individual experiences of work and employment across contexts, such as that of public service professions.

Austerity measures and neoliberal reforms alter the conditions of employment and work in public service in several, potentially interconnected ways. The JD-R model offers a framework that allows interrogating the dynamics of characteristics of work and employment (working conditions) with either positive or negative connotations in regard to job quality and associations with a range of individual job outcomes (Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2013; de Jonge, Demerouti and Dormann, 2014; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). This focus - to simultaneously capture how working conditions have not only been altered, but also how such changes affect individual

experiences of working conditions and associated outcomes - suits a study seeking to contextualise work design models utilising austerity measures and neoliberal reform to exemplify change in macro-level context alongside meso-level institutional characteristics (professionalism) pertinent to individual outcomes. These influences either directly alter characteristics of work and employment in public service, or cascade down, having more nuanced interactions and effects.

The influence of institutional context on (experiences of) working conditions as well as their interdynamic, which ultimately shapes individual outcomes, however, is underexplored in occupational health and work design literatures (Morgeson, Dierdorff and Hmurovic, 2010; Dierdorff and Morgeson, 2013; Demerouti *et al.*, 2017; Harney, Fu and Freeney, 2018; Dierdorff, 2019), whereas the latter, specifically the JD-R model, provide useful flexible, interdynamic conceptual frameworks for exploring the social meaning of working conditions, allowing to step beyond the assumption of static, fixed sets of working conditions presented in some job quality frameworks (Simms, 2017).

The thesis thus provides a broader examination of the dynamics of working conditions in the context of professional values and the positive or negative individual outcomes these may produce. The research is driven by a focus on the worker (Green, 2006, p. 9) and therefore does not examine what motivates workers to carry out organisationally defined, individual work goals, which is an underlying premise of the JD-R model (e.g. Taris and Schaufeli, 2014; Bakker, 2015). Rather, the perspective taken is a pluralist study of how occupationally shared values influence experiences of (changes in) working conditions, as well as interpretations of the requirements of a job and motivations to work towards these as and how individuals see fit or are constrained to do so by their environment.

## 1.2. The contextual framing: The rationale for selecting the public sector and (semi-) professionalised occupations

In the light of the Great Financial Crisis (GFC) which saw the "crisis of finance capitalism [...] turned into the fiscal crisis of the state" (Morgan *et al.*, 2011, p. 147), governments across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) implemented fiscal retrenchment measures based (largely) on principles associated with 'expansionary austerity' (Blyth, 2013; Dymski, 2013). Contrary to, for instance, so called 'programme countries' such as Greece and Ireland, upon which the implementation of such fiscal consolidation measures was imposed as part of the conditions of fiscal bailout packages (i.e. 'programmes'), the Conservative-led Coalition Government of the United Kingdom (UK) in the years following its election in 2010 voluntarily opted to implement expansionary austerity measures without such pressure by international institutions, such as the European Union (EU) or International Monetary Fund (IMF) (European Commission, 2013; Grimshaw, 2013; Bach, 2016). It is argued that this exemplifies a strong ideological commitment to the neoliberal paradigm which has in some literatures been examined as antagonistic to the ideology of professionalism (Ackroyd, Kirkpatrick and Walker, 2007; Noordegraaf, 2016; Bach, 2019). While being mindful of the overall variety in effects of fiscal consolidation packages on associated public sector reform measures, this thesis therefore places particular emphasis on the Anglo-Saxon variant of this neoliberal public sector reform phase.

The macro level context (and change therein) embodied in public sector reform is taken as an illustrative backdrop to study how changes at varying levels of context may intertwine to shape experiences of work and employment. The primary focus is on occupational settings characterised by conflicting ideologies with those of the neoliberal state and the related

struggle for control over (meaning in) work (Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd and Walker, 2004a; Leicht, 2016a; Hardering, 2020). Neoliberalism and by association, managerialism, have been presented as a competing ideology to that of public service professionalism (Crompton, 1990; Freidson, 2001).

Considering that the public service workforce comprises a higher proportion of 'professionalised occupations' (Bach, 2019) and being cognisant of debates surrounding the extent to which public sector workers are more 'altruistically' or 'prosocially motivated' (e.g. Houston, 2011; Prebble, 2016) provides a particularly interesting context for a study framed in a pluralistic conceptualisation of the employment relationship.

Neoliberal reformers have portrayed the public sector workforce as enjoying 'privileged' terms and conditions in their justifications for fiscal retrenchment and public sector reform measures (Grimshaw, 2013), whereas certain strands of sociological literature similarly discuss professionals as primarily interested in leveraging control over a field of knowledge to obtain elevated social and economic rewards, such as more favourable working conditions and pay (e.g. Johnson, 1972; Abbott, 1988; see Saks, 2016a, for overview). Professionalisation as a lever to 'better' jobs has been considered to explain some dispersion in favourable aspects of work and employment across the occupational hierarchy (Suddaby and Viale, 2011; Williams and Koumenta, 2020).

The above arguments illustrate that professionalism can be understood as a social structure in the sense that it contains a relational element and can shape the manifestation of other social phenomena (Porter, 2000).

Therefore, in building a pluralist conceptualisation of how experiences of work and employment can be understood, as attempted to be captured in work design models, professionalism offers the potential to explore social mechanisms affecting dynamics in and on work design models, as an alternative to methodological individualism. Whilst research has examined institutional structures at the occupation level in connection to favourable

characteristics of work and employment, such as occupational closure through licensing (Williams and Koumenta, 2020), the dynamic, for instance, of professional (or occupational) values with experiences of characteristics of work and employment — as well as their effects on individual outcomes — remains underexplored (Dierdorff and Morgeson, 2013; Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017; Dierdorff, 2019).

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to understand the nature and experiences of professional work and employment in the context of public sector reforms.

### 1.3. Thesis objectives, overview and research questions

The introduction to this chapter identified the aim of the thesis, which is to understand the nature and experience of work and employment within the context of public sector reforms in professional work, by building an interdisciplinary, multilevel framework that expands on a widely used occupational health and work design model.

In order to understand experiences of work and employment within the context of public sector reforms in professional work, the first objective is to examine this context and associated reforms to be able to grasp its influence on working conditions in the public services, as well as changes therein. Chapter 2 explores the rationale and guiding principles behind neoliberal public sector reform, before outlining the approaches to reform adopted in the shadow of expansionary austerity drawing on an analytic heuristic following the logic of the ‘three Es’ of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. This provides the overarching contextual backdrop to the study and logic by which to organise discussion of the macro-level context discussed in later thesis chapters.

In the light of the current 'psychologisation of I/ER' debate, Chapter 3 evaluates the utility, limitations and adaptability of adopting psychological models as an analytical framework for a more broadly framed, employment relations focused study. In particular, the Job Demands-Resources model is identified as especially pertinent to contemporary debates as well as offering useful conceptual framings for the analysis of characteristics of work and employment in relation to individual outcomes in an interdynamic manner. Several limitations in adopting occupational health and work design models for pluralistic ER-oriented studies are identified. These are the assumption of a unitarist employment relationship and managerialist bias in theorising alongside methodological individualism and, relatedly, an insufficient contextualisation of the phenomena under study. In addressing these limitations so to more holistically understand experiences of work and employment in public service professional jobs in a reform context, the chapter emphasises the importance of taking social, and not purely individualistic, mechanisms into account. It is argued that institutions, or the institutional context of work and in particular professions and the ideology of professionalism hold relevance to understanding (experiences of and changes in) public sector work and employment. The final part of Chapter 3 presents pertinent professional values drawing together those frequently identified across various sociological perspectives.

Having gained an understanding of the range of rationalising public sector reorganisation measures employed in the light of austerity in Chapter 2, Chapter 4 then seeks to identify an analytical framework that allows the exploration of the dynamics of professional values (as presented in Chapter 3) with experiences of characteristics of work and employment, considering macro-level influences such as reform measures and regulatory environments. Chapter 4 thus presents an adapted conceptual framework building on concepts from the Job Demands-Resources model as evaluated through the lens of professional values and taking into account the particular nature of public sector employment relations. These relations are



characterised by tensions in the competing interests of the neoliberal state as employer/reformer, public service professions and their trade unions. This framework further reflects the several levels of analysis pertinent to the research, namely: macro-level influences (public sector reform); meso-level influences (professional values); job-level characteristics (professional job demands and resources), and finally; individual-level outcomes (e.g. job satisfaction, intention to leave). Based on the literatures reviewed in the preceding thesis chapters as outlined above, four research questions (RQs) were formulated. Chapter 4 concludes by presenting and elaborating on the formulation of the four research questions, which follows the logic of the conceptual framework.

These research questions (visualised as a diagram in Figure 1.1. below and presented more in depth in Section 4.5.) are:

*RQ1:*

How do the effects of neoliberal public sector reforms on characteristics of public sector work and employment differ across occupational contexts?

*RQ2:*

To what extent, and how, have public sector reforms shaped job demands and job resources in the context of professional values?

*RQ3:*

How have individuals in professions experienced public sector reforms in terms of job demands, job resources and professional values?

*RQ4:*

What role is played by occupational context?

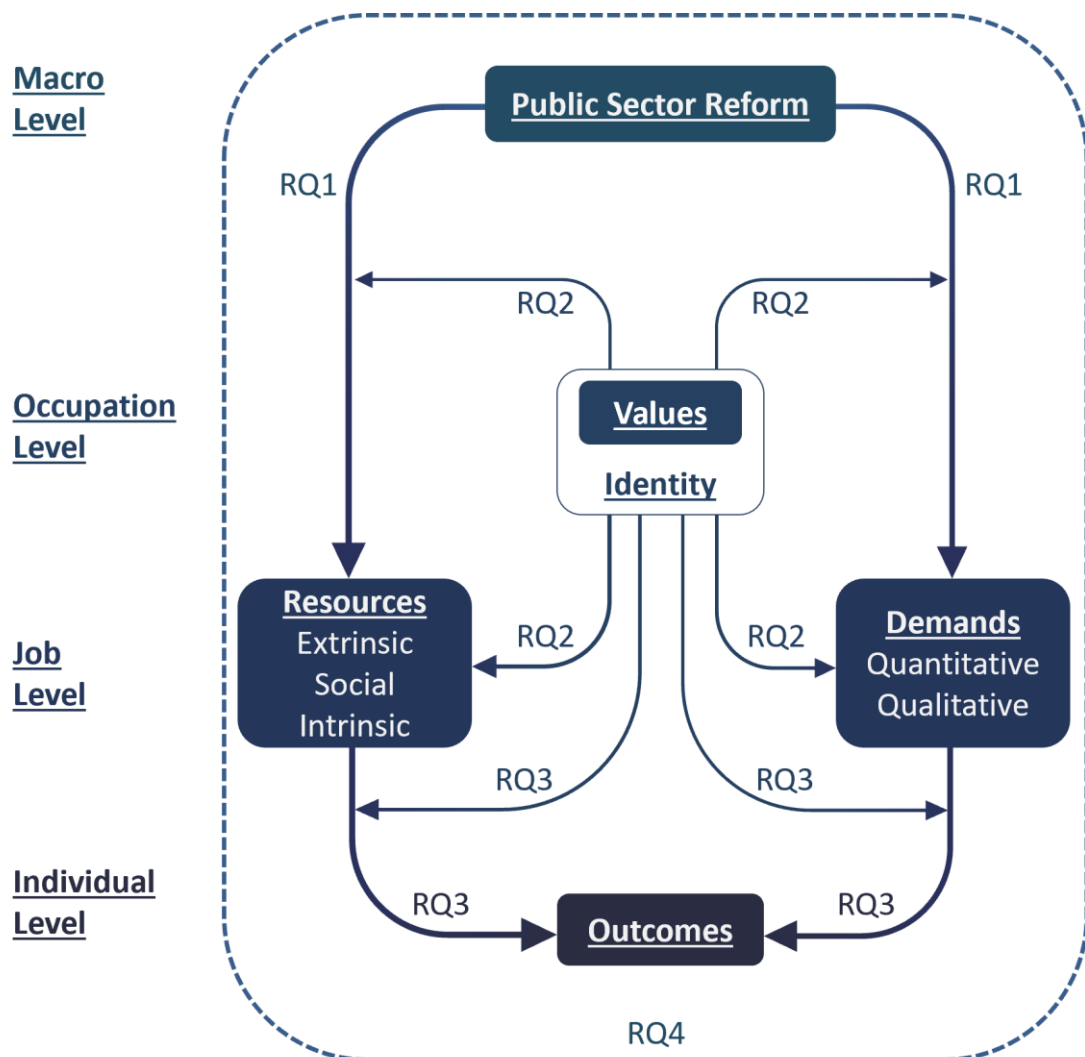


Figure 1.1: The analytical framework and research questions (RQs)

Chapter 5 begins by evaluating the contribution of a critical realist approach to inquiry into the subject matter beyond the dominant positivist paradigm prevalent in work psychology. The chapter continues by presenting the rationale for the selection of case study methods, and the qualitative research instrumentation and sampling logic in regard to research participants and sites. The context of austerity measures in Scotland and associated public sector reform guide the selection of two case studies pertinent to the study's focus on professional values and working conditions in the light of public sector reform; namely, the Fire and Rescue Services and Further Education in Scotland. Subsequently, the particulars of each case study's dataset are presented and relevant aspects of the fieldwork process

within each case study highlighted, acknowledging challenges therein. The final section of Chapter 5 presents the analytic strategy adopted and concludes by addressing matters of reflexivity as well as limitations in the chosen methodological approach.

Chapters 6 and 7 present the empirical findings from the two case studies, following the structure of the analytical framework presented in Chapter 4. In doing so, two distinct occupational settings, both characterised by organisational restructuring as a key reorganisation measure, are explored. The chapters begin by outlining public sector reform measures under austerity along the logic of the 'three Es' and related changes in the characteristics of work and employment. Subsequent sections detail job demands and resources for firefighters and further-education lecturers in the light of professional values and public sector reform. The final sections of Chapters 6 and 7 discuss positive and negative individual outcomes for these two occupations in relation to (changes in) professional job demands and resources.

The central purpose of Chapter 8 is to present the research contributions. The first part of the chapter begins by briefly restating the research problem, before a short cross-case synthesis of findings from the empirical case studies, including a mapping of the public sector reform context, is presented. The following, substantive part of Chapter 8, reviews the conceptual propositions that are drawn from an evaluation of the empirical elements of both case studies against the conceptual framework, in relation to the four research questions. Based on the conceptual implications identified in addressing each research question, the theoretical and empirical contributions are presented in the following part of the chapter. The chapter concludes by highlighting the study's limitations and areas for future research.

## *Chapter 2. Neoliberal reform, austerity and the public services*

The United Kingdom (UK) is exemplary of ideological attachment to the neoliberal paradigm, with the UK being among the first movers specifically in regard to corresponding public sector reform (Bach, 2019). Three stages can be established to understand the related changes and conceptualisations of this ideology over the last four decades since the late 1970s/80s. The latest iteration, framed as austerity, is commonly seen as a response to the Great Financial Crisis (GFC) (Grimshaw, 2013; Bach, 2016). As opposed to other EU countries, the UK was not pushed towards these measures by EU institutions (Grimshaw, 2013). Instead, the then Conservative-led Coalition (later majority Conservative) Government pursued an approach to long term cuts in public expenditures often described as expansionary austerity. Expansionary austerity programmes constituted the seizing of political opportunity to further 'neoliberalize' the state (Bach, 2016; Reed, 2018). The aim of the thesis is to understand experiences of characteristics of work and employment as embedded within their respective macro-level context currently lacking in influential work design and occupational health models.

This chapter takes a heuristic approach in that it focusses in on partial representations of the process of neoliberalisation relevant for linking macro-level research context into the construction of a multi-level analytic framework. The context of public sector reform provides a particularly illustrative example of the relevance of macro-level influences on the dynamics and working conditions encapsulated in these models from beyond the level of the organisation. Neoliberal public sector reform is concerned with a rationalisation of expenditure on the welfare state. Section 2.1. gives a very brief outline of neoliberalism as ideology, and how it was conceptualised in different economic and political contexts in the UK over three distinctive stages. Section 2.2. steps back from these stages to core concepts informing reforms implemented by government seen as responses to economic crisis.

The three guiding principles for policy makers: 'economy', 'efficiency', and 'effectiveness' are used to present the material changes within the public sector. The aim of the chapter hence is to move from the ideology of neoliberalism, to concepts, to reforms and measures, understood as the process of neoliberalisation. The central observation advanced in this chapter is that the latest stage, often referred to as expansionary austerity, focusses solely on the financial and fiscal outcomes. The dismissal of concern for quality of delivery in this latest wave is, as this thesis argues, a core macro-level influence for individual reactions to this context and collective agency.

## 2.1. Neoliberalism and neoliberalisation: The 'watershed moment', the 'third way' and 'expansionary austerity'

Neoliberalism is founded in the ideas of liberalism and maintained the latter's conviction of the superiority of a small or no state paired, in some accounts, with the acknowledgement of the necessity of some form of state in so far as to serve the protection of upper class interests (Blyth, 2013; Reed, 2018). Liberalism was generally associated with the core notion that the market provided the ideal form for organising the socioeconomic order with the state acting in as much a 'laissez faire' manner as possible promoting individual freedom; in the traditional European liberalist sense referring to broad personal freedom, as Harvey (2005, p. 20), notes. The neo-liberalism which emerged, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, in the 1970/80s is of the view that the state rather should as much as possible facilitate and actively encourage socioeconomic organisation based on the principles of the market, across international borders, and, relatedly, promote an 'entrepreneurial spirit' and narrower conception of individualism as mostly to do with individualised notions of social responsibility (in place of a state) and

entrepreneurial freedom above and beyond personal freedom, while yet remaining as lean as possible (Jessop, 2002; Harvey, 2005, pp. 22; 80; Blyth, 2013).

Neoliberalism does not constitute a coherent, uniform set of ideas on how to organise the socioeconomic and political order, neither have associated public sector reform approaches, especially to how the sector is managed, organised and funding structured, been characterised by uniform policies and measures. This highlights the influence of what is contextually possible in regard to reforms at any one time, ad hoc political decision making and opportunism as well as contradictions inherent between neoliberal ideology and how this can in effect be translated into reforms (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017, pp. 32–45).

As far as the UK context is concerned, the first stage of neoliberal reforms in the late 1970s and early 1980s represented “an important watershed” (Ackroyd, Kirkpatrick and Walker, 2007, p. 10) in a shift away from the prior ‘custodial’ profession-led modes of public service delivery to marketized consumer-centric provision. The effectiveness and outcomes of such reforms, which have since somewhat dominated public sector reorganisation efforts in the UK, have varied (Ackroyd, Kirkpatrick and Walker, 2007; Noordegraaf, 2016).

In the UK, the roll out of neoliberal public sector reforms can be differentiated by three different stages:

### *Stage 1: The New Right - The ‘watershed moment’*

Central to New Right doctrine of the late 1970s was the firm belief that free markets, ostensibly regulated by competition and consumer choice, would produce the economically most advantageous outcomes (Kirkpatrick and Martínez Lucio, 1995; Jackson, 2014). The ideal of a ‘minimalist state’ was to be achieved through the privatisation of large parts of the public sector

deemed as stifling competition on markets and individual freedom of choice (*ibid*). Rooted in the belief that the private sector service delivery model offered greater efficiency in resource use and quality of outcomes, parts of the public sector deemed unsuited to privatisation were reorganised (Beaumont, Pate and Fischbacher, 2007). This sought to emulate private sector practices in attempting to mimic market-like mechanisms, such as through the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering requirements on 'quasi-markets' for public goods (*ibid*). Hand in hand with the former, reforms to curb 'burdensome' amounts of public spending were deemed best overseen through the introduction of the management function (Ackroyd, Kirkpatrick and Walker, 2007; Thompson, 2007). Management was perceived to offer liberation from bureaucracy and self-interested, inflexible public servants and professionals (Bach and Kessler, 2009; Burnham and Horton, 2013).

#### *Stage 2: New Labour's 'third way'*

New Labour argued for a 'strong state', as distinctive to a 'big state' (Bach, 2002), in order to foster an economy able to compete internationally (Bach and Kessler, 2012c). In the vein of its predecessor government, New Labour remained critical of public servants' intentions and degree of control over public service delivery, convinced of the beneficial nature of private sector involvement in public service delivery (Bach and Kolins Givan, 2011). Instead of reversing prior privatisations (Bach, 2002), New Labour continued to some degree with what has been referred to as 'the hollowing out of the state' (Thompson, 2007). Maintaining a "value-for-money emphasis and predilection for market or quasi-market incentives and disciplines" (Thompson, 2007: 22), the approach envisaged multi-actor involvement in public service delivery, including citizen consumers (Bach and Kessler, 2012c), yet under more recentralised regulation and audit regimes reflecting to some degree a continued critical view of public servants and public service professions (Bach, 2002, 2016). However, fewer privatisations and what

some scholars argued was a less aggressive pursuit of marketization (Bach, 2002, 2016) also arguably illustrate that the scale of and reform content itself is context dependent and as such, dependent on what actually remains open to further reform (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017, pp. 215–216). ‘Best value’ principles in allocating public service provision across suitable suppliers (instead of aggressive wholesale outsourcing under competitive tendering) suggest what has been described as a “social rather than fundamentalist market approach” (Bach and Kessler, 2012c, p. 44). This approach became referred to as the ‘Third Way’ (Corby and Symon, 2011).

### *Stage 3: The Conservative-led Coalition Government’s ‘expansionary austerity’*

In this contested economic approach, cuts to government spending during a recession are seen as facilitating investor confidence in signalling potential future tax cuts (Blyth, 2013). Moreover, public sector wages are deemed to contribute to higher wage levels elsewhere in the economy, whereby measures targeted at reducing these (namely, strategies of ‘internal devaluation’) are believed to return economies to growth. As emphasised by the OECD (2011a; 2011b), the size of government deficits and debt, rather than the size of public expenditure and thus amount of workforce compensation, to some extent influenced the scale of cuts and measures taken. Some have considered the crisis to have shifted the focus of neoliberal reforms “from efficiency gains to budget savings” (Eurofound, 2015, p. 61), this suggests a false dichotomy as strategies surrounding efficiency gains can complement fiscal moves towards budgets savings.

For this thesis, the central conclusion that can be drawn from the above discussion is that austerity sits on a public sector that has seen significant changes over the past four decades. At the same time, given the longitude of this process, some aspects of neoliberalisation have been normalised. In the



following section, the focus is on the core concepts defining the public sector reform approaches.

## 2.2. Public sector reform in the UK context: Revisiting the ‘Es’ - the content, methods, and management of neoliberal rationalisation measures

Neoliberal public sector reform is concerned with expenditure reduction on public goods and services (rationalisation) and hence the creation of a ‘lean’ welfare state, for which it has tended to orient itself along what have been referred to as the ‘three Es’ of ‘economy’, ‘efficiency’ and ‘effectiveness’. The logic of the ‘three Es’ have provided a continuous red thread for public sector reform measures in the UK since the 1980s (e.g. Worrall, Mather and Seifert, 2010; Gale, 2012). The emphasis on the logic of which ‘E’ and what reforms could at what point in time be carried out is, as above arguments have emphasised, dependent on historical context. The below section lays out the trends, logic and associated reform measures of each of the three principles in the context of austerity.

### 2.2.1. ‘Economy’: Cuts to the volume of financial and staff public sector resources

The principle of ‘economy’ in rationalising public sector reform concerns inputs (e.g. Bouckaert and Van Dooren, 2015) and thus describes the volume of resources, namely financial and, relatedly, staff, ‘utilized’ in or available for

the delivery ('production') of public services. As such, the notion of 'economy' corresponds to the 'costs' of public service delivery (Hood, 1991; Diefenbach, 2009). The creation of a lean state sitting at the heart of the neoliberalist paradigm (Kirkpatrick and Martínez Lucio, 1995, p. 17) in this vein translates into rationalisation of expenditure on public service delivery.

'Rationalising' forms of public sector reorganisation measures target reducing the size and number of public sector entities through mergers, privatisation and outsourcing (Thompson, 2007; Hermann and Flecker, 2009; Alonso, Clifton and Díaz-Fuentes, 2015).

Considering that service provision is inherently labour intensive, reducing workforce compensation was seen as central to effecting public expenditure cuts in the light of austerity (Glassner and Watt, 2010; Gottschall et al, 2015). Direct cuts to remuneration and benefits, as well as reductions in the composition and size of the workforce, were implemented to reduce workforce-related expenditure (OECD, 2012, p. 23). Direct reductions in workforce compensation in the UK concerned wages and pensions. In the years shortly after the GFC, 64% of public sector workplaces in the UK were found to have implemented either freezes or cuts in wages (van Wanrooy *et al.*, 2013a, p. 19). Generally, such wage freezes were widely implemented unilaterally at UK level in Westminster, circumventing collective voice mechanisms such as negotiation with trade unions, which yet maintain wider representation in public service workplaces, alongside wider collective bargaining coverage (Bach, 2019).

Reducing the size of the public sector workforce and thus public service 'production' costs may be effected through redundancies, recruitment freezes or other hiring restrictions, early or incentivised retirement (European Commission, 2012, 2013). These may be supplemented through reorganisation measures targeted at utilising the remaining workforce in a manner deemed to offer increased efficiency, i.e. by utilising the remaining

workforce more intensely (as is detailed in Section 2.2.2. below). Public sector employment levels in the UK have reduced by 15.3% since their peak in 2009, the bulk of which can be explained by several large scale re-privatisations (ONS, 2015).

### 2.2.2. 'Efficiency': Changing methods and reorganisation of public sector resources

The logic of 'efficiency' in neoliberal public sector reform concerns principles around how resources, namely financial and staff, in the delivery of public services are 'utilized' in relation to 'outputs' (e.g. Bouckaert and Van Dooren, 2015). This thus could also be thought of as relating to changes in the 'methods' of how such public sector 'resources' are 'used' to achieve certain outcomes. Reorganisation efforts have been considered as facilitating rationalisation measures, such as the 'elimination of waste', 'streamlining organisational functions' (e.g. Carter *et al.*, 2013b)

Streamlining took place specifically through mergers (Vaughan-Whitehead, 2013, p. 7). Public sector mergers in the UK took place both at state level (between public sector organisations of related but not equal types) as well as at the inter-organisational level (namely between the same type of organisation) (Cabinet Office, 2014). These kinds of mergers entailed the scaling back of support functions in forming a single back office (Randma-Liiv and Kickert, 2017; for UK, see Cabinet Office, 2014). During expansionary austerity, the UK's Coalition Government had reduced the number of public bodies by around a third, from a total of over 900 to approximately 600 (Cabinet Office, 2014, p. 4). This figure included more than 170 public bodies which had been identified for merger as a result of "overlapping or similar functions" (Cabinet Office, 2014, p. 3).

Internal reorganisation efforts were aimed at ‘streamlining’ organisational functions OECD (2011b). Examples of efforts to ‘streamline’ internal organisational functioning include ‘organisational delayering’ (encompassing reductions in management tiers or business units), increases in ‘shared services’ or usage of IT systems (OECD, 2011a; Eurofound, 2015)

Neoliberal public service reorganisation measures have attempted to generate greater productivity or efficiency by utilising resources differently (“doing more with less”) (Hood, 2013, p. 216), such as work reorganisation targeted at reducing ‘waste’ (downtime) (Diefenbach, 2009; Gale, 2012; Carter *et al.*, 2013b).

At the organisational level, this could be in the form of downsizing and internal reorganisation, and/or at the job level through changes to working-time patterns or job roles, for example through skills-mix changes (Hebdon and Kirkpatrick, 2009; Worrall, Mather and Seifert, 2010; Hammerschmid *et al.*, 2013). This may further include the opening of internal labour markets under a flexibilisation or casualization of the workforce, standardised or ‘lean’ work practices and the introduction of cheaper staff sub-grades (assistant roles, such as for nurses and teachers) (Bach, 2011; Symon and Corby, 2011; Bach and Kessler, 2012d; Ackroyd, 2013; Carter *et al.*, 2013a).

Flexibilisation of the workforce within organisations generally concerns greater freedom to the employer with regards to how labour is utilised (Bach and Bordogna, 2013). This may encompass changes to working times and patterns, such as longer working hours or changes to shift patterns to e.g. reflect ‘demand’ or peak times, which Piasna (2017) refers to as ‘employer-led flexibility’. There is evidence of some changes having occurred, extending weekly contractual working hours across public services (European Commission, 2013, p. 143; Eurofound, 2015, pp. 75–76). Multiskilling, so to increase the number of work tasks which could be carried out by any one

worker and reduce downtime, further are associated with a more flexible utilisation of labour (Carter *et al.*, 2011, 2013a, 2013b).

### 2.2.3. 'Effectiveness': Managing and executing rationalisation

Reorganisation of oversight arrangements for more effectiveness in public service delivery is thought to be facilitated by strengthening the management function, in turn drawing on metrics and performance measurement. Greater individualisation of relations with public service users and the breaking up of collectivities, such as trade unions, are deemed to aid increased managerial oversight.

#### *Managerialism: The introduction of private sector style management practices*

The prior discretion and autonomy held by public servants, seen as being based in the monopolisation of certain skills and areas of knowledge, was considered opposite to controls based on bureaucratic ideas or market rationality (Cousins, 1987, pp. 94; 108; Freidson, 2001). The former 'monopoly controls' (Cousins, 1987, p. 95) became a primary target of neoliberal public sector reform. Management was perceived to offer liberation from existing bureaucratic controls "associated with inflexibility, rigid job demarcations and a preoccupation with inputs rather than outputs" (Bach, 2010, p. 565). In regards to controlling professional work, Noordegraaf (2007) considers conflict to emanate from the dichotomy of the neoliberal paradigm, which espouses 'business-like' treatment of public service users over professional, inferential case treatment.

Occupational practitioner control of work was a product of the complexities involved in this work; requiring specialised knowledge and skills (Evetts,

2014). In order to open up professional markets and propelled “by a distrust of professional expertise and trade union influence” (Bach and Kolins Givan, 2011, p. 2359), neoliberal reform needed to break or weaken “the symbiotic link between ‘knowledge/power’” (Reed, 2007, p. 185). Tayloristic principles of work organisation, concerning greater standardisation and routinisation, provided the tools for professional work to become fragmented, easier to monitor and therefore more readily controllable and open to scrutiny by lay persons, paving the way for managerial control of performance and outputs (e.g. Carter *et al.*, 2011; Gale, 2012). In considering marketized relations as the superior structure for public service delivery, this predicates the conviction of the superiority of practices and ways of managing believed to have originated and be predominant in the private sector (Bach and Kolins Givan, 2011), which could be described as “cost- and client-based managerialism” (Noordegraaf, 2007, p. 763). Generally, the introduction and strengthening of a management cadre could be seen as part of the broader move towards private-sector style practices (Diefenbach, 2009; Bach, 2010). Creating more managerial positions, reinforcing the status of managers in order to adopt “a more ‘business-like’ approach” (Bach and Kessler, 2008, p. 473) resulting in greater power, responsibilities and control over work of public sector managers reflects what once was a ‘new’ managerialism (Walsh, 1995; Bach and Bordogna, 2011) asserting “management’s right to manage” (O’Reilly and Reed, 2011, p. 1088). Yet, this leaves the problem of differentiating what accounts for a private sector style of management (Ashworth & Entwistle, 2011) compounded by what Reed (2016) calls “a monolithic view of ‘managerialism’” resulting from treating rhetoric as actual practice.

*Metrics and performance measurement: Operationalising quality, standards and 'customer choice' in public services*

Underpinned by the assumption that the self-interest of public servants had led to public services which were wasteful of public resources, overly bureaucratic and unresponsive to the public's needs (Horton, 2009), approaches to quality improvement in public service delivery revolved around perceptions of efficiency and productivity in order to deliver 'value for money' (Walsh, 1995; Deakin and Walsh, 1996; Worrall, Mather and Seifert, 2010; Shaoul, 2011). Judging the quality of professional work in public service against their perceived ability to deliver 'value for money' represents the commodification of professional work (Diefenbach, 2009; Evetts, 2011). Instead of a primary concern with ethical conduct, methods and procedures, the content of scrutiny on professionals shifts to having to "prove their added value" (Noordegraaf, 2007, p. 763, original emphasis). Ultimately, the 'value added/value for money' should conform to service end-user expectations (Martínez Lucio, 2007; Rosenthal and Peccei, 2007) which, however, often remain predicated and defined by management and government (Crouch, 2009)

Quality assessment and evaluation consequently shift from being rooted in professionals' expertise to managerially and governmentally defined performance regimes involving various measures and mechanisms (Worrall, Mather and Seifert, 2010, p. 127). These include external audits seeking to replace the peer audits still more prevalent in some parts of the public services (Svensson, 2006). Control, monitoring and assessment are carried out through targets, audits, inspections informed by "best practice-concepts", benchmarking, league tables, customer feedback mechanisms, Balanced Scorecard and other management information systems" (Diefenbach, 2009, p. 899; Shaoul, 2011). Work procedures become standardised, which may be aided through use of IT, such as various software applications (Evetts, 2011, p. 414; Ackroyd, 2013, p. 33). Increased standardisation of work to open this

up to enhanced measurement may also, for instance, be observed under the introduction of national frameworks, such as a national curriculum (Bach and Kessler, 2012a, pp. 181–2).

Performance is increasingly measured in terms of outputs, for which targets are set (Hood, 1991; Alonso, Clifton and Díaz-Fuentes, 2015). Targets have become instrumental in frontline services fending for funding allocations, in being able to defend their existence and receipt of public funds under ‘value for money’ narratives (Evetts, 2003; Bach and Kessler, 2009). However, as Crouch (2009, p. 892) cautions that “targets establish priorities, but by political or managerial decision, not in response to markets”, this can have adverse consequences where defining what would be a ‘success’ or a reasonable target proves challenging in practice (Walsh, 1995; Evetts, 2011). Moreover, tightened performance monitoring, such as through targets, can increase administrative workloads and ensuing paper trails associated with these reporting mechanisms (Bach and Kessler, 2008; Crouch, 2009).

### *Reorganisation for greater individualisation of the socioeconomic order: Relations with public service users and collective rights*

The individualisation of the socioeconomic order under neoliberalism was to be realised through reforms directed at transforming public service delivery models, toward greater individualisation. In parallel, a reduction of collectivities and collective rights was sought, being deemed barriers to such individualisation of responsibilities.

#### *Individualisation of citizens/public service users*

Introducing market-like competition for ‘customers’ to public services was believed to create pressure on public servants to maintain adequate quality standards or cost efficiency, instead of prioritising codes of ethics (or a ‘public



service ethos') produced by what were considered self-serving professionals (Lethbridge, 2011; Leicht, 2016a). The introduction and amplification of 'consumer voices' in public service conception, design and delivery have seen an intensification of external input and direction (Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd and Walker, 2004b). This relates to satisfaction surveys, complaints procedures (Horton, 2006) or other forms of involvement from the public, such as in boards of governance or consultations under Best Value regimes inputting into performance plans (Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd and Walker, 2004b).

'Consumer choice' initiatives were, for instance, associated with the introduction of individually portable funding pockets (Crouch, 2009) and performance measurement (Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd and Walker, 2004b; Evetts, 2009), that would create 'transparency' and serve to inform individual choices (Bach and Kessler, 2009; Tonkens, 2016). In some parts of the public services, such as education, reforms have sought to remedy some aspects of this information asymmetry by making available selectively-curated performance details to 'empower' and guide individual decision making when choosing one provider over another (Rosenthal and Peccei, 2007; Crouch, 2009; Tonkens, 2016). These performance metrics concern, for instance, success rates in exams in schools (Crouch, 2009) or league tables (Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd and Walker, 2004b; Evetts, 2009). These reforms ultimately challenged the previous service interaction between professional and service user, based on trust for the former to act in the best interest of the latter or public, and sought to introduce more stringent external controls on professional practice instead (Le Grand, 2003b; Evetts, 2012; Tonkens, 2016). 'Consumerism', according to Freidson (2001, p. 106), as much as 'managerialism', in essence contests professional authority over the control and evaluation of specialist work.

*Collectivities as labour market barriers: Reducing collective rights, trade unionism and collective bargaining*

While neoliberalism emphasises individual freedom of choice, this can become problematic should individuals chose, for instance, collective representation through trade unions, posing obstacles to the free rule of the (labour) market (Harvey, 2005). Governments with a particularly strong attachment to the neoliberal paradigm have hence sought to limit the rights to freedom of association, such as in trade unions (Morgan *et al.*, 2011). Indirectly, this took place as a spillover effect of privatisation and outsourcing measures reducing total public sector union membership, alongside wider societal trends. The latter related to preferences with regards to collective interest representation associations while legislatively, a more direct weakening of collective employment rights took place (Grimshaw, 2013; Bach, 2016). For example, the Trade Union Act 2016 (UK) altered existing legislation and introduced yet greater challenges to trade union organising and industrial action, such as reductions in facility time and higher thresholds for votes in balloting. Control and accountability mechanisms therefore seek to integrate partnership models in governance to further involve the interests of private business and other outside stakeholders (Jessop, 2002, p. 454; Harvey, 2005, p. 77), sometimes alongside or to counterbalance the influence of workers' collective interest representation institutions.

## 2.3. Chapter conclusions

The chapter underlined the relevance of macro-level context for understanding characteristics of work and employment, as well as drivers for changes therein. These tend to be neglected in occupational health and work design models (exceptions include, for example, Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017; Harney, Fu and Freaney, 2018; Dlouhy and Casper, 2021) within which working conditions are either assumed as givens (i.e. independent variables), capped at the level of the organisation (i.e. decided by management) or, as strongly predominant in work design literatures, shaped through individual behaviours, such as job crafting (e.g. Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti *et al.*, 2017; Roczniowska and Bakker, 2021). This chapter provided an analytical logic for incorporating macro-level context in the construction of a multi-level contextualised adaptation of occupational health and work design. Chapter 3 further explores the extent to which such models can be adapted, drawing on multiple disciplines, to offer a contextualised view of the employment relations in which jobs and psychosocial models are embedded.

### *Chapter 3. Adapting the Job Demands-Resources model for public sector professionals' experience of work*

Chapter 2 outlined the range and nature of neoliberal reforms affecting public sector workforces as implemented under expansionary austerity. These reform measures provide an illustrative example of a complex institutional context. This complexity indicates the need for understanding how changes in working conditions are experienced, accepted, contested and negotiated by social agents, drawing on notions such as power, ideology or conflict (Bailey *et al.*, 2017; Bal and Dóci, 2018). As was highlighted in Chapter 1, in the light of the 'psychologisation of industrial / employment relations (I/ER)' (Godard, 2014) debate, an aim of this thesis is to explore the extent to which influential occupational health and work design models can be adapted, drawing on multiple disciplines, to offer a contextualised view of the employment relations in which jobs and psychosocial models are embedded. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to introduce the key elements of one such model, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, and evaluate whether it can be adapted to help understand how public sector professional jobs are experienced in their social context, in particular a context of public sector austerity-based reforms.

The chapter begins by introducing the main conceptual premises of the JD-R model in Section 3.1. This is followed by an evaluation of the utility offered in adopting a conceptual framing based on the model (Section 3.2.). The limitations inherent in the assumptions underpinning theories and research approaches in mainstream work psychology, such as that of a unitarist employment relationship are discussed in Section 3.3. This critique leads to a discussion of how some of these limitations might be addressed in the adaptation of psychosocial work design models from a pluralistic perspective (Section 3.3.3.). The role of broader and institutional context has increasingly been highlighted within psychological work design literatures (e.g. Morgeson,

Dierdorff and Hmurovic, 2010; Dierdorff and Morgeson, 2013; Harney, Fu and Freaney, 2018; Dlouhy and Casper, 2021). Going further, sociological research examining experiences of job characteristics and individual job outcomes, such as job satisfaction, has emphasised the need for taking into account wider social structures, such as gender and class, beyond explanations focusing on individual differences in perceptions or preferences (e.g. Tausig and Fenwick, 2011; Stier and Yaish, 2014; Hebson, Rubery and Grimshaw, 2015). The final substantive section of the chapter (Section 3.4.) examines the role of institutional context at the meso-level, namely the level of the occupation or profession, in addition to the macro-level context previously provided in Chapter 2. Professional values are argued to provide evaluative standards and pertain to ideal ends sought in an action situation (Schwartz, 1994; Hitlin and Piliavin, 2004), and as such provide a lens for evaluations of characteristics of work and employment. The final substantive part of the chapter thus considers in detail professionalism in terms of a set of occupationally shared values according to the main themes developed in sociological literatures.

### 3.1. Introduction to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model

The JD-R model is founded in the premise that the characteristics of any job can be separated into two overarching categories - job demands and job resources - according to their either negative or positive effects on individual job outcomes. The original intention of the JD-R model was to show that burnout could be considered inherent to the characteristics of a job rather than merely an idiosyncratic experience (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). It since has been applied to the study of a broad range of individual job outcomes and their antecedents (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

Although called the *job demands-resources model*, in combining literatures from the fields of (job) stress research and work motivation theories, the model's scope is broader than traditional job design (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014, 2017). This also reflects more recent wider definitions of job design to comprise the "processes and outcomes of how work is structured, organized, experienced, and enacted" (Grant, Fried and Juillerat, 2011, p. 418). In work design literatures, intrinsic characteristics of work and their association with individual or organisational outcomes have been studied more intensively (Van den Broeck and Parker, 2017) than social characteristics (Humphrey, Nahrgang and Morgeson, 2007; Grant, Fried and Juillerat, 2011) or extrinsic outcomes of work (e.g. pay; Gallie, 2007a; George, 2011). Nevertheless, the model offers a framework for reflecting on a plethora of characteristics of jobs in terms of dimensions of work and employment in relation to individual outcomes.

Job demands are conceptualised as those activities or characteristics of the job which require physical or psychological effort which may eventually (and under certain conditions) become strenuous. If endured for long amounts of time with few coping resources, including opportunities to recover, job demands may result in job strain which is shown to be a predictor of various physical and psychological indicators of work-related stress (for a more detailed discussion, see Section 4.2.1.). In JD-R literatures, job resources are characteristics which enable coping with job demands, as well as fostering positive wellbeing through a "health-promoting [...] i.e. motivational process" (Lesener, Gusy and Wolter, 2019, p. 95).

The model has mostly been examined in terms of self-reported job dimensions as well as individual outcomes (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Lesener, Gusy and Wolter, 2019). Increasingly, research efforts have focused on how to explain variation in these individual evaluations of job characteristics in relation to their posited effects (e.g. stress/health impairment or 'motivation') and associated outcomes (e.g. turnover

intentions), rather than assuming that some job characteristics, such as autonomy, are universally experienced as positive (Crawford, Lepine and Rich, 2010; Schaufeli and Taris, 2014; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; van Veldhoven *et al.*, 2020).

Job demands have been conceptualised as ‘challenge’ or ‘hindrance’ demands depending on appraisal of their effects as either ‘motivational’ or health impairing (Crawford, Lepine and Rich, 2010; Bakker and Sanz-Vergel, 2013). In some conditions a demand can be experienced as both a challenge and hindrance demand (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Under what conditions job resources come to have their postulated positive effects on individual outcomes also has been argued to warrant further examination (van Veldhoven *et al.*, 2020). Individual differences have been proposed as potential explanations; e.g., what an individual positively values or not (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014). The observation that demands can act as resources (challenge demands) and resources can negatively tax the individual (demanding resources) (Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2013) has posed further questions.

A large body of research has shown interactions between demands and resources, which may buffer or amplify effects. Challenge/hindrance demands, alongside personal resources, are shown to have unique, multiplicative effects on individual outcomes, as well as reverse causal relationships suggested by longitudinal studies and explained through ‘individual job crafting’ and job resource ‘loss/gain spirals’ (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). From the perspective of the dominant positivist paradigm within work psychology (Bal and Dóci, 2018), this is seen as having established the model’s predictive and explanatory power and thus its evolution to have “matured into JD-R theory” (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017, p. 273). Nevertheless, Schaufeli and Taris (2014) retain an element of scepticism viewing the core model as descriptive in the absence of comprising in-built explanatory mechanisms to explicate why the model’s

constituent elements are related in the way they are. As the authors put it, the “theoretical claims of the JD-R model follow from the way job demands and job resources are conceptualized [by definition] and therefore do not explain the relations under study” (2014, p. 55). The adequacy of a purely motivation based processual positive health explanation has also been challenged (Boxall, Huo and Winterton, 2019), whereas more critical writers go further in questioning the nature and portrayal of ‘motivation’ in work design theories overall (Thompson and McHugh, 2009, chap. 21). Going even further, the philosophical assumptions embodied in the above arguments are viewed critically in research traditions which challenge any predictive links between (imperfectly measurable) objective job characteristics and subjective individual attitudes (Thompson and McHugh, 2009, chap. 21; Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014).

## 3.2. Applying a psychosocial model within the study of employment relations

### 3.2.1. Addressing the ‘psychologisation of employment relations’

As Chapter 1 observed, a core concern with the growing psychologisation of industrial/employment relations (Godard, 2014) is that the study of employment relations as an inherently multidisciplinary field is seeing a decline in disciplinary pluralism. Kaufman (2020, p. 50) described the process of psychologisation as:

*“...the drive to reduce explanation of macro-level HRM outcomes to within-person psychological/behavioural constructs, processes, and states and their cross-person differences.”*



Some scholars consider the fields of HRM and ER to cover much of the same ground, namely the experiences and activities of actors in and regulation of the employment relationship (for instance, Townsend *et al.*, 2019), albeit with a key distinction in HRM's concern residing with establishing linkages to organisational performance (Kaufman, 2020). As Sisson (2020, p. 11) reminds us "Employment relations is multi-disciplinary. Roughly translated, this means [...] building on and seeking to integrate the often contending insights from the traditional disciplines of economics, sociology, psychology, law and politics". In this vein, building on disciplinary strengths in the development of an interdisciplinary framework for understanding experiences of work and employment offers the possibility of overcoming a discipline's blind spots and capitalising on shared areas of concern (Edwards, 2005).

The following sections seek to identify the strengths and areas of shared concern and compatibility of work psychology perspectives, specifically the JD-R model, to a broader anchoring in ER. It is argued that the JD-R model offers an interdynamic, flexible framework for examining working conditions (Section 3.2.1.) and useful conceptual dimensions for categorising working conditions (Section 3.2.2.).

### 3.2.2. The JD-R model as a flexible and interdynamic framework

The JD-R framework offers flexibility and the possibility to account for change in its constituent parts rather than being static in three regards (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). First, the JD-R model was devised to explain individual-level outcomes, e.g. burnout, as resulting from any unfavourable constellation of working conditions associated with any given job or occupation (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). To achieve this, the model does not hold a priori stipulations concerning which

working conditions will be most salient in any given job; this feature sets it apart from prior work design and occupational health models (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014) and static job quality frameworks relying on a set of a priori stipulated working conditions (Simms, 2017). The two overarching dimensions of working conditions (demands and resources) captured in the model provide a way of categorising any characteristic of any job according to its postulated either positive or negative relation with individual outcomes rather than stipulating a fixed set of particular job characteristics applicable to all jobs. Similarly, a view of job quality as an approximation to the optimum constellation of specific job characteristics seen as 'good' or 'bad' has been lacking in terms of a full explanation of the context and influences pertinent to understanding workers' experiences of job quality diverging from such a priori assumptions (Brown, Charlwood and Spencer, 2012; Hebson, Rubery and Grimshaw, 2015; Knox *et al.*, 2015).

Second, the working conditions captured in the JD-R framework are interdynamic in nature allowing exploration of how working conditions interact with each other and their effects, as well as factors beyond them, such as personal characteristics, to shape individual outcomes (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Consequently, job resources "may reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs" (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001, p. 501) as well as 'buffer' the negative effects of job demands (Crawford, Lepine and Rich, 2010). Similarly, job demands may reduce the positive effects of job resources on individual outcomes as well as negatively relate to job resources directly (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014). Various constellations of job demands and resources may interact differently to produce various individual outcomes, such as by creating multiplicative, additive or compensatory effects (de Jonge, Demerouti and Dormann, 2014; Zapf *et al.*, 2014). A loss of autonomy in high-reliability organisations, for instance, may be compensated for by high levels of task significance in protecting the wellbeing of others (Kellner, Townsend and Wilkinson, 2017).

Third, the JD-R model has been conceptually extended to recognise and explain potential changes and fluctuations in working conditions, albeit in a predominantly individualistic manner. The prior assumption of both work design literatures (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017) as well as wider job quality debates in which job characteristics are assumed to be fixed, determined by management and relatively enduring (Kalleberg, 1977; Brown, Charlwood and Spencer, 2012; Simms, 2017) as such to some degree has been challenged.

In work psychology literatures, fluctuations and changes in working conditions have been explained through mechanisms involving individual attitudes, perceptions or behaviours potentially producing job resource 'loss' or 'gain spirals' or through individual 'job crafting', namely the notion that individuals may optimize their own working conditions (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001; Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2013; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018).

Moving beyond individualistic explanations and mechanisms for changes in job characteristics, this leaves open the possibility of examining group-level driven changes to working conditions, such as trade unions or professional organisations negotiating on behalf of worker collectivities as well as professionalisation efforts (Findlay, Kalleberg and Warhurst, 2013; Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017; Simms, 2017; Williams and Koumenta, 2020). Work design scholars have, for instance, argued that the characteristics of work which are most pronounced in a job relate to occupational values - referred to as 'structural correspondence' (Dierdorff and Morgeson, 2013). This notion of 'structural correspondence' resonates with sociological interpretations of professions as social actors engaging in institutional work to shape facets of organisational structures and work practices (Scott, 2008; Suddaby and Viale, 2011; McCann *et al.*, 2013).

### 3.2.3. The utility of job demands and job resources as framing categories

The two main categories of the JD-R model - demands and resources - provide useful conceptual framing for working conditions in three regards. First, job demands can include a plethora of sources of intensity in work requiring effort or characteristics of work generally seen as unfavourable for individuals. Job demands in JD-R literatures are compatible with sociological debates on work effort and work intensity (cf Green, 2006; Muñoz de Bustillo *et al.*, 2009; OECD, 2013; Granter *et al.*, 2019). Job demands conceptually are able to capture and accommodate all sources of intensity in work reflecting their multidimensional nature. Similar to the temporal, emotional, physical and organisational dimensions of effort and intensity in work highlighted by Granter *et al.* (2019), job demands pertain to quantitative (workloads and time pressures) and qualitative (psychological and physical) aspects of the job also associated with pressure and effort (van Veldhoven, 2014; Zapf *et al.*, 2014).

Second, job resources concern what have been considered antecedents of wellbeing at work (Guest, 2014; Bailey *et al.*, 2017) and comprise the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards offered from work (e.g. Siegrist, 1996; Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). In part, the concept of job resources draws from research broadly focused on explaining stress and focused on the 'coping resources' available to individuals in the face of threatening or challenging situations or events (Hobfoll, 1989; Richter, 2000; Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018).

In a similar vein to job demands, utilising the concept of job resources to categorise a dimension of working conditions in relation to more positive or negative individual outcomes is useful in two regards. The first concerns job resources' ability to foster coping with job demands and wellbeing directly (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007; Lesener, Gusy and Wolter, 2019). The notion of job resources as 'health promoting' (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001, p. 501) and as

instrumental for coping provides a useful way of thinking about positive or favourable aspects of work and what workers want from their jobs in terms of rewards or what makes them remain (e.g. Fuchs, 2007). Conceptually, it is therefore argued that the notion of job resources could be interpreted in the broadest sense possible to include those resources situated beyond the individual job level which facilitate coping, ameliorate other working conditions and offer material and non-material rewards.

Sociological research provides examples of a broader interpretation of (coping) resources framed within a wider view of social organisation. One example of this is research seeking to understand mental health in relation to the dynamics between social structure, stressors and social resources (McLeod, 2013; Tausig, 2013). As Bauwens, Decramer and Audenaert (2021) have noted, job resources, for example in public service jobs, may be located at levels beyond that of the organisation and be more homogenous for certain groups of employees. Job resources offer the potential to introduce levers for change in their function to potentially negate job demands and resist otherwise unfavourable working conditions (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Thus, macro- or group-level 'coping resources' or levers for improved working conditions go beyond individual-level constructs and may concern collective institutions, such as trade unions negotiating job content of their members or professional associations regulating standards and advocating for their occupation (ten Brummelhuis and Bakker, 2012, p. 551; Findlay *et al.*, 2017; Martínez Lucio, 2020).

Finally, both categories of working conditions accommodate reflections on the social meaning of working conditions. Social context shapes how sources of intensity in work are experienced. Some may still be regarded favourably, retaining some rewarding and meaningful experiences of work; e.g. where these characteristics are seen as fundamentally tied to an occupation's sense of purpose and foster, for example, a sense of mastery, accomplishment, or gratitude from others. Other sources of work intensity are

more negatively evaluated (Granter *et al.*, 2019; Hardering, 2020). This resonates with the distinction between ‘challenge’ and ‘hindrance’ job demands into which sources of intensity in work may fall depending, to some degree, on a broad range of individual and contextual factors (Semmer and Beehr, 2013; Zapf *et al.*, 2014). In the same vein, job resources have more recently been proposed as fostering individual wellbeing at work in particular depending on whether these are valued (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014). Therefore, these may also offer a useful conceptual framing for highlighting the social meaning of working conditions considering the social origins of work values (Esser and Lindh, 2018; Gallie, 2019).

### 3.3. Addressing the limitations of psychosocial theorising

There are some notable limitations in adopting the JD-R model as a lens for understanding employment relations in a specific context. These limitations are partly inherent in the focus on individuals and related philosophical assumptions (Troth and Guest, 2019; Kaufman, 2020). The nature of the employment relationship is either implicitly or explicitly characterised by unitarism in the JD-R model (e.g. Bakker, Albrecht and Leiter, 2011b), thus affecting the content and focus of research and what ultimately is expressed in theorising (Godard, 2014; Harley, 2015; Bal and Dóci, 2018). A further limitation emerges from the theory’s acontextual framing and methodological individualism. These issues are discussed further below before presenting a more holistic framing building on the JD-R model.

### 3.3.1. Limits of a unitarist and managerialist frame of reference

The JD-R model and much work psychology theorising more broadly assumes a unitarist employment relationship (Bal and Dóci, 2018; Budd, 2020). Unitarism assumes that, at the most overarching level, employers' and employees' goals and interests can and do align in a mutually beneficial manner (Budd and Bhave, 2008). This unitarist frame of reference is evident in two, interrelated ways.

First, the belief in a 'harmonious employment relationship' becomes apparent in that organisational interests are treated as unproblematic (Purcell, 2014; Budd, 2020). Consequently, this provides a central rationale in how research is framed and for the selection of concepts utilised and investigated (Bal and Dóci, 2018). Specifically, those phenomena and concepts seen as positively resonating with what is desirable from the point of view of the organisation/management, such as questions over motivation, performance and productivity, are given precedence (George, 2011; Bal and Dóci, 2018), while seeking to positively frame this to reinforce the narrative surrounding mutuality as opposed to 'hard' forms of control and coercion in achieving these organisationally desirable outcomes (Purcell, 2014). Consequently, the emphasis has been on particular intrinsic characteristics of work and 'soft' regulations to manifest in organisationally desirable individual attitudes and behaviours, such as work engagement (taken as an indicator for individual wellbeing), organisational commitment and citizenship behaviour, from which organisational gains are postulated to flow (e.g. Budd and Bhave, 2008; Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013; Sparrow, 2014; Jenkins, 2019). According to Bal and Dóci (2018, p. 454), this has meant that "pluralism of research is stifled through a dominance of hegemonic ideology within the discipline (e.g., through implicitly enforcing organizational interests to be accounted for in research)." However, the larger issue with this is the underlying instrumentalism behind attempting to build a better understanding of

individuals at work (Godard, 2014; Jenkins, 2019). This highlights the need for a non-unitarist, non-managerialist adaptation of psychological models.

Second, the pluralist, critical frames of reference which have traditionally underpinned ER-based studies (Fox, 1974; cited by Budd, 2020) draw from phenomena which broader social science disciplines have sought to explain. The role of structure and agency, power, ideas and ideology, economic and political forces (Sisson, 2020), alongside conflicting interests and related issues of control and resistance are absent or under-recognised in psychological theorising (Harley, 2019). While some notion of agency has been embraced by JD-R theory concerning 'proactive' individual behaviours, such as 'job crafting' (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017), agency is expressed at the individual level, rather than collective, and as inherently conforming with unitarist assumptions surrounding work goals. In the absence of recognising wider influences, such as power imbalances between employers and employees (and their collective interest representation institutions) (e.g. Bailey *et al.*, 2017) or, for instance, ideology, gender and class, this leaves areas of under-theorisation limiting the explanatory power offered by psychological theories.

The ensuing issue with this ontological blind spot, as Godard (2014, p. 8) points out, "is not so much that I-O [Industrial and Organisational] psychologists are inherently anti-union [but] that they often have little comprehension of why unions exist, and, more important, why they should exist." Wider social context up to the level of the organisation is recognised, and sometimes even structures from within the wider political economy in relation to job characteristics are acknowledged, such as public sector reform under austerity (Demerouti *et al.*, 2017; Molina and O'Shea, 2020). The focus, however, falls on individual behaviours and attitudes to foster realignment to and continued psychological functioning under these changed organisational realities, on which no critical reflection is passed (Bal and Dóci, 2018).



According to Purcell (2014, p. 244)

*“This is dangerous reduction of work relations to individual attributes and failings, showing no recognition of interpersonal and systemic conflict nor the conditions which lead to conflict and its variation between organisations and contracts.”*

A unitarist perspective, as Budd (2020) points out, at least in essence allows for recognition of diverging interests, if yet these are seen as manageable through ‘soft’ people management techniques. This implicitly acknowledges the ‘control imperative’ emanating from the indeterminacy of labour such that organisations (managers) seek to attain that workers exert effort toward what is of organisational interest; be it through ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ controls (Thompson and Harley, 2008). The particular emphasis in ‘soft’ regulatory techniques on a positive conceptual framing, effects and outcomes leaves open discussion of negative experiences and common realities of ‘hard’ control mechanisms, such as quantitative metrics based performance management (George, 2011; Purcell, 2014).

While areas of cooperation within the employment relationship exist and need emphasising, for example concern for patients’ welfare in nursing (e.g. Carvalho, 2014; Olakivi and Niska, 2017), the issue with reducing conflict to merely being a question of dysfunction in either people management techniques or the individual (Purcell, 2014) is that it fails to acknowledge conflict as substantially emanating from the imbalance of power inherent in the employment relationship making it “a contested terrain” (Edwards, 2005, p. 266) of “structured antagonism” (Edwards and Hodder, 2022). In this, wider structures shape the bases out of which conflict arises and how (i.e. the mechanisms) through which this is expressed, such as changes in work organisation and individual or collective conflict expressions, including resistance through misbehaviour, individual or collective grievances (Edwards, 1990; Thompson and Harley, 2008; Currie *et al.*, 2017; Kirk, 2018). Without a fundamental appreciation of this, emphasising the role of

employers to consult with employees or facilitate other management-driven voice mechanisms (cf. Bakker, Albrecht and Leiter, 2011b), is unlikely to address the imbalance of power between employers and employees and inferior to mechanisms for negotiation offered by trade unions and collective bargaining (e.g. Godard, 2014). As Prilleltensky and Stead (2013, p. 20) have argued “By neglecting power differentials, psychology promotes the values and assumptions of dominant groups.”

As far as the public services are concerned, for example, it is at the level of characteristics of employment that austerity measures seeking to cut public expenditure are likely to have the biggest direct bearing on changes to public sector jobs considering that the bulk of this expenditure is accounted for by workforce compensation (e.g. Glassner and Watt, 2010; Gottschall *et al.*, 2015). Ultimately, such changes to employment relationships may result in conflict, rather than merely the negative individual attitudinal effects of an erosion of such resources as, for instance, predicted under effort-reward imbalances (cf Siegrist, 1996).

The resulting “institutionally blind perspective” (Godard, 2014, p. 4) and, thus, the failure to recognise matters surrounding, for instance, trade unions, collective bargaining, conflict, control, and power (Harley, 2019) are problematic not just in their absence in work psychology’s approach, but more importantly because of the influence such models have across wider job quality debates (see Chapter 1).

### 3.3.2. The need for macro-level context

Psychosocial models have been critiqued for offering an individualistic perspective on work organisation and its outcomes which largely are decontextualized of the extra-organisational environment (Jenkins, 2019).

While there is no issue per se in the individual forming the unit of analysis, some argue that a-social/-relational individual 'within-person' explanations of behaviour are unrealistic considering that individuals are social beings (Manicas, 2006, p. 82; Kaufman, 2020). Thus, individual behaviour cannot be explained in an asocial manner (Bhaskar, 2013). As Porter (2000, p. 146) cautions "Understanding actors' viewpoints may be a necessary condition for social knowledge, but it is not a sufficient one". Particular attention must be paid to what is not covered and the extent to which individualistic, to varying degree a-contextual, explanations could be taken to offer a fuller picture of phenomena under study than they actually do (Thursfield and Hamblett, 2004; Edwards, 2005; Wight, 2014, p. 230).

The increasing hegemony of attributing phenomena more purely 'within-person' explanations centring heavily on individual differences generating variation in attitudes, behaviour, or perceptions (Harley, 2015; Kaufman, 2020), is also apparent in JD-R theory. JD-R theory details the role of individual behaviours, such as 'job crafting' and 'self-undermining', in terms of 'gain' or 'loss' spirals for individuals to maintain their own wellbeing and functioning in work (e.g. Hakanen, Peeters and Perhoniemi, 2011; Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018; Roczniowska and Bakker, 2021). Such narrowly focused theorising may ascribe too much agency to the individual to engage in such behaviours. In so doing, individual functioning at work may increasingly become seen as a question of adapting individual interactions with working conditions when in effect working conditions, in particular job demands (e.g. ten Brummelhuis *et al.*, 2011), are predominantly set by the employer and their wider environmental or institutional context (Daniels, 2006; Keenoy, 2014).

This connects to the previous arguments concerning the imbalance of power in the employment relationship thus neglecting that employers ultimately hold responsibility to ensure adequate working conditions, while potentially overstating individual ability to resist or shape unfavourable working conditions (e.g. Fenwick and Tausig, 2007; Purcell, 2014; Bal and Dóci,

2018) and ultimately “means that explanations of a holistic nature are not likely to emerge” (Harley, 2015, p. 401). Group-level mechanisms situated outwith individual organisations are not typically considered in psychological research (Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017). It would, for instance, be conceivable that higher degrees of professional control over the content of work (i.e. of professionalisation) may facilitate job resource ‘gain spirals’ (see, for example, for autonomy in the broadest sense, Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). In particular in public services working conditions may be broadly more homogenous across the sectoral and occupational level, such as through trade union representation, (national or sectoral) collective bargaining and standardisation of work practices as part of occupational professionalisation processes (Daniels, 2006; Scott, 2008; Bauwens, Decramer and Audenaert, 2021).

Although positivist psychological theories espouse incremental development and revision as new knowledge emerges (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017) and as such the role of context is increasingly explored or emphasised (Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017), this has remained underexplored (Dierdorff, 2019; van Veldhoven *et al.*, 2020). Neither has this remedied how taking context into account in research is approached. This concerns, for example, what facets of context are accounted for and how these are operationalised (Sparrow, 2014; Harley, 2015; Kaufman, 2020), such as relatively fixed, limited sets of variables shaping the relations or outcomes of other variables under study or as an uncritically accepted backdrop to the study limited in the extent to which the influence of this contextual backdrop can be accounted for in research. Political-economic context, such as recessions or government fiscal austerity, rarely are directly evaluated in their influence and relevance to phenomena under study (exceptions include, e.g. Harney, Fu and Freeney, 2018; Dlouhy and Casper, 2021) but instead more so may be considered in the selection of intra-organisational phenomena psychological research explores (e.g. Demerouti *et al.*, 2017; Molina and O’Shea, 2020).

Consequently, to varying degree decontextualized, individualistic approaches do not sufficiently account for the overarching relevance of social structures (including institutional or economic structures) and may overemphasise individual agency, be it that of managers or, in particular, workers to individually shape their/a single set of working conditions (and even that of work psychology interventions themselves) (e.g. Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013; Thompson, 2013; Bal and Dóci, 2018).

### 3.3.3. Towards a more holistic framework

The limitations discussed above are especially important in assessing the commensurability of adapting a conceptual framing rooted in work psychology to fit studies in wider employment relations. A more holistic understanding of working conditions and their individual outcomes from a perspective adopting a pluralistic frame of reference is proposed in this thesis. An adaptation of the JD-R framework that avoids being restricted to a managerialist frame of reference offers the potential for exploring the notion of job resources in their thickest terms; that is, in characteristics of work and employment enabling coping with the demands of a job as well as offering positive experiences of work beyond the current approach to job resources as vessels for achieving outcomes which align only with the organisation's interest (cf. Purcell, 2014; Taris and Schaufeli, 2014; Bailey *et al.*, 2017). Instead, group-level resources from an employee-centric perspective are considered. Such an adaptation is not simply addressed by incorporating, for instance, the role of trade union activity or collective bargaining as mediator or moderator variables. Two specific developments are proposed.

First, acknowledging the imbalance of power inherent in the employment relationship, a better understanding of work and employment can be built with a shift away from an emphasis on 'proactive' individual behaviours and

move towards greater recognition of structures which constrain and influence the actions of individuals (e.g. Kaufman, 2020). This means accounting for an imbalance of power and diverging interests as well as employee and employer strategies to manage these; that is to focus on social rather than solely individual mechanisms (for social mechanisms, see, for instance, Porter, 2000; Porpora, 2013; Wight, 2014). To this end, it is necessary to dedicate attention to the control mechanisms by which employers seek to manage employee performance under potential conditions of diverging interests (Thompson and van den Broek, 2010; Godard, 2014; Currie *et al.*, 2017). Manifestations of control strategies on the employer side may concern 'hard' regulations, such as performance management, but also bullying and other more covert forms of coercion (e.g. Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013; Kirk, 2018). Workers perceive these as connected to demanding, negative aspects of work (Semmer and Beehr, 2013; O'Brady and Doellgast, 2021). As such, these features need to be accounted for in research.

Diverging interests from the employee perspective may manifest in collective and individual strategies to attempt to resist changes in the characteristics and purposes of their work and employment and shape how work is carried out. Attempts of employees to contest control over characteristics of work and employment may manifest, for instance, in collective resistance through trade union involvement, industrial action, efforts to professionalise or as an occupational group attempt to negotiate job redesign, or individual resistance, such as individual grievances, misbehaviour or 'surface compliance' (Larson, 1977; Alvesson, 2013; Thunman, 2016; Currie *et al.*, 2017; Kirk, 2018; Chen, Currie and McGivern, 2021).

However, areas of cooperation must also be recognised (Edwards, 2005; Harley, 2019). Employees may also comply with or consent to carrying out their work tasks as set by the organisation (Ackers, 2019). Pluralist research must also seek to understand the reasons for and conditions under which this happens, as Budd (2020, p. 76) reminds us that "unitarism is contained within

pluralism". In particular in a public service context in which altruism or more general prosocial work motives were traditionally considered important factors in explaining individual attitudes to work (see, for instance, literatures on Public Service Motivation (PSM) or the Public Service Ethos (PSE), including but not limited to Perry and Wise, 1990; Pratchett and Wingfield, 1996; Carr, 1999; Le Grand, 2003a; Lethbridge, 2011; Perry, 2015), the overall goals and purpose of a public sector organisation as offering a genuine shared interest need not be discounted or neglected. According to Olaviki and Niska (2017, p. 23), professionals and managers may also hold some "shared values, norms, practices and principles".

A second development concerns a more detailed integration and examination of the role of institutions in the individual-employer-context dynamic which influences experiences of working conditions. Incorporating institutions as underpinning group-level job resources offers a perspective on conceptualising job resources which is underexplored within organisational behaviour literatures. The concept of job resources remains a useful umbrella dimension for favourable aspects of work and employment, including coping resources. In relation to their interdynamic with job demands, job resources also offer a useful way for reflecting on such working conditions in ER's job quality debates.

In the sociology of the professions, the 'professional project' which aspires to occupational control over various job quality dimensions so as to influence these broadly in an occupation's favour are generally acknowledged, as well as professional access to various 'capitals' (such as social, cultural, symbolic resources) (Johnson, 1972; Larson, 1977; Abbott, 1988; Suddaby and Viale, 2011; Alvesson, 2013). Nevertheless, in work design literatures, the influence of professionalisation, professions or professionalism have yet to be examined systematically as occupation-level influences alongside relevant occupation-level mechanisms, e.g. professional associations or single profession trade unions. These shape not only experiences of work and

employment in multifaceted ways, but also have bearing on their inter-dynamics; for example, providing normative standards for behaviour against which job characteristics are evaluated (see, for instance, Evetts, 2003; Hardering, 2020; Williams and Koumenta, 2020; Chen, Currie and McGivern, 2021). Such dynamics, in turn, have implications for individual outcomes (Dierdorff and Morgeson, 2013). In the next section, the role of professions as meso-level institutions grounded in sets of professional values are explored in more depth.

### 3.4. The institutional context of work and employment for professions during public sector reform: the role of professional values

The effects of job characteristics on individual outcomes vary across individual, occupational, national or sectoral contexts (Morgeson, Dierdorff and Hmurovic, 2010; Bakker and Sanz-Vergel, 2013; Borst, 2018; van Veldhoven *et al.*, 2020). This may in part be due to the influences of institutions embedded in these various contexts and the values and norms these encapsulate (Dierdorff, 2019). The final section of this chapter draws on sociological and organisation literatures to facilitate a broad, holistic conceptualisation of the extra-organisational, institutional environment within which experiences of work and employment are embedded, with a focus on professions and the specific context of public sector reform. The approach taken contrasts with those which operationalise complex institutional environments as a limited set of moderating or mediating variables (cf Harney, Fu and Freeney, 2018; Rattrie, Kittler and Paul, 2020; Dlouhy and Casper, 2021), or which reduce values to personal, individualistic phenomena, such as ‘personal resources’ or ‘personal demands’ (cf Van den



Broeck *et al.*, 2011, 2013; Demerouti, Bakker and Fried, 2012; Lu *et al.*, 2015; Borst, Kruijven and Lako, 2019)..

The following sections discuss how professions have been conceptualised in sociological debates and how professionalism can be understood as a distinctive form of controlling and organising professional work, as an 'institutional logic' or 'ideology' associated with these occupations and anchored in certain values (e.g. Evetts, 2011). Rather than focusing here on specific occupations or professions, common themes across sociological traditions are discussed in order to identify a set of professional values deemed relevant for work experiences in a public sector reform context and which may hold in cross-occupational comparison.

The discussion also focuses on the specific institutional context of public sector reform under austerity. This has entailed institutional change within public services which, alongside other macro-level influences, has had implications for public sector professional work (Noordegraaf, 2016). The role of institutions in understanding experiences can be seen in two ways. First, institutions and institutional change as reproduced or altered by agents can connect to the manifestation of other phenomena (Porter, 2000; Scott, 2008). For instance, trade unions seek to ameliorate their members' job quality (Simms, 2017), governments pass legislation to regulate aspects of work and employment (Budd and Bhavie, 2008), and professions or occupations seeking to professionalise pursue maintaining or attaining occupational control over their working conditions (e.g. Abbott, 1988; Macdonald, 1995). Second, institutions are anchored in certain sets of values, beliefs, and norms and thus (to some degree) provide the evaluative criteria through which its members interpret their experiences and which influence their actions (Sisson, 2020), while no longer being reducible to individuals' conceptions of them (Porter, 2000).

Professions as institutions (or professionalisation as the process towards obtaining the occupational status of full profession) thus may affect the manifestation of (some) job characteristics through occupational regulation and control of work, whilst providing social agents with a normative evaluative framework comprising occupational values and set of formal and informal rules through which to interpret, maintain, enact or change the job characteristics associated with an occupation (Porter, 2000; Alvesson, 2013; Williams and Koumenta, 2020; Wright, Irving and Selvan Thevatas, 2020). Considering that values provide evaluative standards (Schwartz, 1994, 2012; Hitlin and Piliavin, 2004), professional values are considered to provide an evaluative lens for experiences of changes to job characteristics in terms of job demands and resources.

### 3.4.1. Conceptualising professions and professionalism

'Professions' have been distinguished from other occupational groupings in the social order. This allows some definitional boundaries, although scholars more recently have come to view hard distinctions between professions and other occupational groups as more fluid and as "differences of degree rather than kind" (Evetts, 2013, p. 780). Overall, conceptualisations of professions as distinctive occupational groups have been based on several divergent views. The bulk of these, for simplicity, can be divided into the early Trait and Functionalist perspectives of around mid-last century, and 'conflict' or 'power' based approaches (Crompton, 1990; Saks, 2010; Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011; Evetts, 2014), as well as their more recent adaptations, such as neo-institutional perspectives (e.g. Scott, 2008; Muzio and Kirkpatrick, 2011; Ackroyd, 2016; Saks, 2016a). These perspectives have further implications for conceptualisations of the nature professionalism.

The Trait and Functionalist perspectives viewed professions as distinctive occupational groups either by virtue of possessing certain traits or their purpose as serving a socially desired function that set these occupations apart from others and justified the economic and social rewards (e.g. financial rewards, elevated social status and prestige) endowed on them (for overviews see, for example, Evetts, 2014; Ackroyd, 2016; Saks, 2016b, 2016a). Conflict or power based approaches have discussed professions as occupational groups seeking to command self-interested ends in terms of the content and context of work (e.g. working conditions, influence, financial rewards, occupational prestige) either in terms of the relations of markets, in Neo-Weberian theorisations (e.g. Johnson, 1972; Larson, 1977; Abbott, 1988; Macdonald, 1995) or 'production' as in certain applications of Marxist perspectives (Ackroyd, 2016; Saks, 2016a; Reed, 2018). The latter saw social privileges endowed on an occupation as rooted in a professions' place in the hierarchy of the relations of 'production' (i.e. in relation to their role in facilitating private corporate interests); the former in terms of a professions' (success in) controlling their respective labour and service markets. Professions were seen as those occupations which had achieved 'occupational closure' to monopolise expertise in a field of practice to, as granted by the state, both hold the ability to control entry to the occupation and the standards of practice, such as through licensing overseen by professional associations (e.g. Cooper et al., cited in Macdonald, 1995).

Status, power, influence and 'attractive working conditions' are considered the social and economic rewards of professionalisation (Suddaby and Viale, 2011; Alvesson, 2013; Evetts, 2013; Saks, 2016b; Reed, 2018). Expertise in terms of skill and knowledge is also characteristic of what distinguishes a profession from other occupations. This is reflected in the criteria of how occupations are classified across various international occupational hierarchies. For example, in the UK, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) classifies occupations across a hierarchy based on the Standard Occupational Framework (SOC). As Anderson and Warhurst (2019, pp. 302–

3) explain “The SOC classification thus ascribes the label “professional” to an occupation based on a definition that envelops both the labour market and labour process demands of these occupations – in other words what skills are needed to both get and do the job”. The SOC (ONS, 2020) classifies jobs across the occupational hierarchy according to four skill levels (university education/long training to general education) in combination with the degrees of skill specialisation (the field of knowledge required to practice an occupation) in each skill level to arrive at nine overarching occupational groupings (see Figure 3.1). These include, for instance, ‘managers, directors and senior officials’ (e.g. CEOs), ‘professional occupations’ (e.g. paramedics, Higher Education/Further Education lecturers, nurses), ‘associate professional occupations’ (e.g. firefighters, veterinary nurses, early education and childcare practitioners), ‘skilled trades occupations’ (e.g. smiths, moulders, weavers) or ‘elementary occupations’ (e.g. warehouse operatives, coffee shop workers) (ONS, 2020).



*Figure 3.1: Spectrum of the nine major occupational group categories according to the Standard Occupational Classifications (SOC) (ONS, 2010, 2020)*

‘Conflict’ theorisations of the professions agree on the self-interested ends professionals seek in and from work (Abbott, 1988; Crompton, 1990; Saks, 2010; Alvesson, 2013; Leicht, 2016a). ‘Professionalism’ consequently has been conceptualised as a type of normative occupational control enforced through sanctions imposed and credentials administered by the occupations’ members (Johnson, 1972; Macdonald, 1995), juxtaposed to market or

bureaucratic controls (Freidson, 2001). Consequently, 'professionalism' was described as an ideology that served both the internal regulation of the behaviour and actions of the members of a profession as well as the external maintenance and justification of an occupation's social status and related rewards (e.g. Evetts, 2003; Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011). Similarly, professionalism has been discussed as a form of 'symbolic capital' in a field of power which serves as "the source of legitimate forms of acting and interpreting" (Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011, p. 93). Functionalist perspectives emphasised professionalism as a 'value system' underpinning professional practice which was of benefit to society (Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011; Saks, 2016a).

Irrespective of whether professionalism is regarded normatively, as inherently good, valuable to society and 'worth preserving' (e.g. as a special form of commitment to a 'higher cause' or altruism), or as serving professional self-interest and maintenance of special social and economic privileges, these perspectives do not differ much in their depiction of the content of professionalism (Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011); only in the purposes ascribed to it (cf. Hall, 1968; Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd and Walker, 2004c; Alvesson, 2013; Newman, 2013; Ackroyd, 2016; Evetts, 2018).

Professionalism as anchored in a particular set of values or upholding certain standards in professional practice and conduct holds across perspectives. Early debates were influenced by a narrow focus on ideal-type fully professionalised occupations (namely, law and medicine), with analysis of the ideology of professionalism skewed toward a narrow focus on the market monopolising powers of expert occupations it was seen as serving (Evetts, 2013). However, there are many occupational groups, such as teachers, which have been unable to protect their interests in the same way and yet endorsed the normative and ideological aspects associated with a profession (Nottingham, 2007; Muzio and Kirkpatrick, 2011; Evetts, 2013; Ackroyd, 2016). Professionalism as comprising a set of shared occupational values, therefore, can also be expressed as a 'vocabulary of work motive' by

occupations who structurally have not (yet) achieved full 'profession' status (Evetts, 2009, 2012; Spillman and Brophy, 2018). Considering the relatively small number of occupations which have achieved full professionalization (Noordegraaf, 2007; Evetts, 2013), this warrants placing more emphasis on shared occupational values above and beyond the formal structural organisation of an occupation in the selection of occupational case studies.

### 3.4.2. Professional values in the context of public sector reform

This thesis considers professionalism as underpinned by a set of occupational values and as such these may be endorsed by an occupation irrespective of whether this has achieved 'full' profession status in terms of occupational closure and monopolisation of a professional field of expertise or knowledge (Evetts, 2009, 2012; Spillman and Brophy, 2018).

Professionalism as encapsulating the commitment to professional values and identities itself, however, may vary in degree (Barber, 1963; Morrow and Goetz, 1988; Nesje, 2017). Professional values frequently identified concern professional autonomy, including judgement, knowledge, and expertise; professional cohesion, standards, and integrity; and prosocial values (e.g. Hall, 1968; Kerr, Von Glinow and Schriesheim, 1977; Bartol, 1979; Morrow and Goetz, 1988; Olakivi and Niska, 2017).

Values, though psychological constructs, are subject to social influences, such as professional or national cultures (e.g. Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, work values, as much as other values, may be in conflict and irrational (Kalleberg, 1977; Schwartz, 2012). As Chapter 2 has underlined, neoliberal public sector reform (as an 'ideal type') ideologically represents a distinct paradigm to that of public service professionals who "remain committed to occupational cultures and identities that reject most of the

normative and institutional innovations associated with modernizing managerialism” (O’Reilly and Reed, 2011, p. 1986). Resulting from what tends to be a strong identification with the particular values of a profession (Parding, Abrahamsson and Berg-Jansson, 2012), professionalism has been discussed opposite managerialism as representing clashing values (Randle and Brady, 1997; Noordegraaf and De Wit, 2012) which are imposed on professionals (Brock, Leblebici and Muzio, 2014) as ‘alien intrusions’ (Noordegraaf, 2015). Professional values and ideals are to various degrees in conflict with and sought to be (or have been) redefined by neoliberal public sector reform (e.g. Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2008; Leicht, 2016a; Olakivi and Niska, 2017).

Austerity-driven reforms seeking ‘to do more with less’ intensify demands on individuals and reflect a realigning of public sector organisational values to those of the market; consumerism and efficiency (Hood, 1991; Freidson, 2001; Evetts, 2009; Leicht, 2016a; Reed, 2018). Professionalism as a set of occupationally shared values (Evetts, 2013) thus provides a suitable focus considering the conflict between public service professions and marketizing and managerialist changes to public sector work and employment (e.g. Noordegraaf, 2015; Leicht, 2016a). Previous waves of public sector reform under New Public Management (NPM), as Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd and Walker (2004a, p. 169) argued, have struggled to erode professional values underpinning core aspects of practice resulting in a “slow, contested and piecemeal nature of change.” Public service professions in a public sector reform context have often been discussed in terms of their resilience to change, attempting to resist or at least in some ways mediate changes imposed by the neoliberal state in a top down manner (Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd and Walker, 2004a; Evetts, 2018). Associated with this resistance to change has been a degree of conservatism in maintaining ‘old’ practices and “a tendency to stick with what is known” (Ackroyd, 2016, p. 21). This was seen as a ‘producer capture’ in terms of public service delivery being organised to suit professions’ rather than citizen/service user preferences (Bach, 2010;

Newman, 2013). However, where reforms seek to rationalise service provision, further limiting the availability of public services, professional resistance to such cuts represents service users' best interests (Freidson, 2001; Ackroyd, 2016; Leicht, 2016a). The remainder of this section considers the inter-relationship between professional values in public services and experiences of work in more detail.

#### 3.4.2.1. Professional values and the experience of job demands/resources under public sector reform

Professionalism may be expected to amplify the negative effects of austerity reforms where values clash irreconcilably and transform characteristics of work further away from the professional ideal. By the same token, the more favourable the perceived effects of organisational change in the public services on daily work practices, the less likely perceptions of stress are to arise from such change (Giauque, 2016). Therefore, rather than conceptualising professionalism as, for instance, a personal or social resource (e.g. Keyko *et al.*, 2016; Nesje, 2017), considering potential value conflict from neoliberal reform and the different scope for values work or resistance based coping strategies to the moral dilemmas imposed (Noordegraaf and De Wit, 2012; Brock, Leblebici and Muzio, 2014; Thunman, 2016; Wright, Irving and Selvan Thevatas, 2020), professional values are anticipated to more broadly shape experiences of job demands and job resources.

Moreover, the relative importance of values fluctuates and these are, though relatively enduring, not psychological constants but open to influence (Locke, 1969; Reed, 1997; Demerouti, Bakker and Fried, 2012). Where job characteristics associated with managerial practice conflict with professional values, the contextual relative importance of the involved professional values may shape subsequent actions and experiences of job characteristics



(Wright, Irving and Selvan Thevatas, 2020). The appraisal of changes to job characteristics under marketizing, managerial reform may therefore not only depend on conflicting values evoking rejection of practices, but depending on what job characteristic is associated with what order value (superordinate, subordinate, basic) or facet of professional identity influences strategies of accommodation, resistance or incorporation of changes in turn shaping experiences of job characteristics and responses to job redesign (Wright, Irving and Selvan Thevatas, 2020; Chen and Reay, 2021; Chen, Currie and McGivern, 2021).

Overall, such social influences shape whether perceptions of job characteristics are more favourable or not, such as what tasks are or are not seen as being within one's professional role (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978; Semmer and Beehr, 2013). Socialisation is considered a key mechanism through which professionalism (or professional values) shapes perceptions of job demands. Some job demands may become normalised to some degree, such as long hours in policing (Turnbull and Wass, 2015) or physically demanding work (Desmond, 2006), to be seen as challenge rather than hindrance demands (Bakker and Sanz-Vergel, 2013; Semmer and Beehr, 2013). However, social influences may further compound the negative effects of job demands where, for instance, tasks are redefined in a manner incompatible with a profession's sense of purpose or of being competent to carry these tasks out (e.g. Semmer and Beehr, 2013; Braedley, 2015; McCann and Granter, 2019; Chen, Currie and McGivern, 2021).

#### 3.4.2.2. Professional purpose and identity as a resource

Professional identities comprise occupationally shared values, ideals, and norms which provide a shared sense of 'service ethic' (Carr, 2014). This professional ethic relates to normative or ideological value controls in upholding certain standards, work practices and relations (Freidson, 2001;

Evetts, 2013). It shapes everyday professional practice in terms of what actions or behaviours are deemed appropriate as well as attitudes towards elements of the job, such as what tasks are accepted to be part of a professional role, which are not and which may be discarded given the opportunity (Davies and Thomas, 2003; Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd and Walker, 2004a; Dierdorff and Morgeson, 2007; Bach and Kessler, 2012d; Kessler, Heron and Dopson, 2015; Dierdorff, 2019; Chen, Currie and McGivern, 2021).

Occupational identities and normative attachment to these have been claimed to be firmly ingrained in workers in public service (O'Reilly and Reed, 2011). Monopolisation of a certain (intellectual) field, can not only set an occupation apart functionally, but occupational regulation of the membership criteria to this field as well as socialisation processes during training and education produce socially distinct professional identities (Noordegraaf, 2007, p. 766; Evetts, 2011, 2013). Particularly in the light of public sector reforms which have direct or indirect effects on redefining the boundaries of the purposes and tasks of public sector organisations and therefore work or professional roles situated within them (e.g. Braedley, 2015; McCann and Granter, 2019), professional identities have in the past proved significant hurdles in effecting such changes (e.g. Davies and Thomas, 2003, 2008; Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd and Walker, 2004a).

It is acknowledged that at the individual level, professional identities may not necessarily be as homogenous as portrayed at the occupational group level here and there is debate around how fixed or ever changing (or continuously re-constructed) identities are (Davies and Thomas, 2003; Alvesson, Lee Ashcraft and Thomas, 2008; Simpson and Carroll, 2008). However, such elaboration is beyond the scope of this thesis as the main interest is in those elements of professional identity which can be assumed to be relatively enduring and shared among the members of an occupation.

### 3.4.2.3. Synthesising perspectives on professional values in the context of public sector reform

The central concepts proposed in the sociology of the professions (functionalist or conflict/power perspectives) portray different underlying values ascribed to professional orientations to work (e.g. Ackroyd, 2016). Conflict approaches place more emphasis on extrinsic rewards, such as job security, or some degree of financial gains commensurate with an occupation's perceived status or prestige, whereas functionalist accounts place more primacy on the intrinsic qualities of work, such as meaningfulness, or the wish to satisfy prosocial motives (Hall, 1968; Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd and Walker, 2004c; Tausig and Fenwick, 2011; Alvesson, 2013; Evetts, 2013; Newman, 2013). Both are relevant for understanding professional values. Extrinsic status is expressed in prestige and recognition (Morgeson, Dierdorff and Hmurovic, 2010, p. 354). Practitioner pride has been described as a form of 'individualised internal self-regulation' to uphold certain moral obligations or ethical professional values (Evetts, 2013) and status has been seen as a source of meaningfulness experienced in work (Kahn, 1990). Professions have also been argued to express intrinsic commitment to 'a cause' and social collectivities, such as 'to science' or the profession (Barber, 1963; Hall, 1968; Reed, 1997; Alvesson, 2013). In functionalist accounts, work is an end in itself providing intrinsic meaning (Snizek, 1972; Freidson, 2001) and a 'sense of calling' (Hall, 1968) which may lead to tolerating reductions in extrinsic rewards. This 'calling' has also been termed a 'sense of vocation' expressing the centrality of work to one's life (Reed, 1997; Jones and Green, 2006).

Values identified in both extrinsic and intrinsic orientations are relevant for this thesis as potential influences on experiences of job demands and resources in the context of public sector reform. Three professional value bundles can be identified at a more universal level to help structure the discussion.

### *Professional autonomy, knowledge and expertise*

First, professionalised occupations are characterised by claims to authority over a body of specialised knowledge or technical skill gained through training (Campbell and Marshall, 2005) and needed to “address common and basic human needs” (Carr, 2014, p. 15) as their primary duty. This is seen to set them apart functionally thus legitimizing their status as a profession (Carvalho, 2014). Professionalised occupations at their closest to this ideal type decide on the design of their work in terms of the processes, procedures and individual tasks this consists of (Johnson, 1972; Freidson, 2001; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2008; Muzio, Kirkpatrick and Kipping, 2011) or put differently “the means and goals associated with one’s work” (Bartol, 1979, p. 817). Professionals were traditionally considered to have significant “control over the process of service delivery” and as such in exerting discretion in everyday practices (Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd and Walker, 2004a, p. 169) and decision making free from client or organisational pressure (Hall, 1968). Aside from such personal autonomy, much professional behaviour is also subject to and shaped by codes of conduct, ethics and ‘going by the book’ (Carr, 2014).

Owing to the specialised nature of professional skills and knowledge, the traditional relationship between professional and lay person or client/service user was characterised by these having to trust that professionals were acting responsibly and in their (or the public’s) best interests (Evetts, 2006, 2014; Pfadenhauer, 2006). As only those from within the profession would share this specialism, maintenance of standards and quality was to be monitored, evaluated and assessed by peers (Snizek, 1972; Bartol, 1979). Professionalism founded in special qualifications, knowledge and skill was seen as an antidote to managerial or consumerist/market control over what and how services ought to be run, designed and provided (Randle and Brady, 1997; Noordegraaf, 2007).

Perceived abuses of trust in terms of professional failure to act in the best public's or client's interest (for instance, as actual medical practice scandals highlight) (Saks, 1995)) gave momentum to managerial and consumerist reforms seeking to limit the scope of professional autonomy. In particular, professionalised occupations in public service had been accused of turning a blind eye to the preferences of service users (Saks, 1995; Tonkens, 2016). Reducing autonomy in public service occupations and standardising work procedures in a way that would allow the general, abstract or esoteric knowledge of professionals to become less skilled and more routinized (Noordegraaf, 2007) has been the focus of consecutive swathes of neoliberal public sector reform (Bach and Kessler, 2012d). Standardisation, however, has also been part of the process of seeking to professionalise (Ponnert and Svensson, 2016). The “production of producers”, in terms of who would be allowed to deliver certain professional services by means of obtaining, for instance, certain credentials, rested on such standardisation of procedures to guarantee competence (Larson, 1977; Muzio, Kirkpatrick and Kipping, 2011).

Autonomy as a professional value corresponds to “occupational practices of ‘expert judgement’ and ‘regulated autonomy’” (Reed, 2016, p. 200). Ideally, autonomy could be seen as freedom from control external to the occupation (Exworthy, Hyde and McDonald-Kuhne, 2016). Being able to exercise discretion in complex work activities as characterising professional work is what Freidson (2001, p. 108) considered to provide intrinsic satisfaction with work. In controlling the design of the work, namely what tasks this should comprise of, critical commentators have highlighted that this has been used to pass on less skilled, more routine and as such less satisfying, less prestigious, “non-glamorous” tasks “to confirm a positive occupational identity” and higher status (Alvesson, 2013, pp. 167–8). Similarly, the introduction of sub-grades to professional roles, such as healthcare assistants to nurses, has seen similar effects (Bach, Kessler and Heron, 2008; Kessler, Heron and Dopson, 2015).

### *Professional cohesion, integrity and standards*

A second value bundle concerns cohesion between professionals which is important considering preferences on how standards are developed, maintained and monitored as founded in a body of knowledge and expertise shared only by members of a profession. Professional codes of conduct and ethics are administered by the profession subject to colleague review which further monitors and sanctions breaches of codes in order to assure service users that certain standards are being met to maintain trust (Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd and Walker, 2004c; Thunman, 2016). While standardisation (through manuals and guidelines) features across both managerial and professional logics (Ponnert and Svensson, 2016), how standards ought to be arrived at and what their focus should be may diverge.

Collegial working practices and peer assessments form the preferred and accepted mechanisms for assuring professional understandings of quality in services as well as the basis for the development (or reviews) of new standards in professional practice and “what is socially and morally acceptable” (Kerr, Von Glinow and Schriesheim, 1977; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2008; De Vries, Dingwall and Orfali, 2009, p. 569; Evetts, 2011, 2013). As expertise is significantly valued among members of a profession, those sharing this expertise are considered best placed to judge the quality and set the standards of professional work (Bartol, 1979; Scott, 2008). This has also been referred to as ‘colleague control’ encapsulated in the ‘belief for professional self-regulation’ (Hall, 1968; Snizek, 1972). Peer reviews therefore are still a commonplace method of audit in, for instance, parts of education (Svensson, 2006). Management-led audits and other types of managerial control are at odds with control and evaluation through such peer reviews (Ackroyd, 2013). Quality from the perspective of professions reflects a concern with inputs and procedures under equal treatment of service users and thus concerns whether professional standards have been upheld (Carr, 2014), whereas quality in public service in neoliberal or managerial terms

tends to be viewed in terms of outputs and efficiency (Hood, 1991; Randle and Brady, 1997; Freidson, 2001; Noordegraaf, 2015, 2016; Lapuente and Van de Walle, 2020). Yet, according to Kerr, Von Glinow and Schriesheim, (1977), collegiate maintenance of standards tends to become more salient where such standards, including ethics, are breached. This shared area of expertise underpins a sense of equality among colleagues (Reed, 1997).

Socialisation through team-based or other profession-led learning and training underpins the transfer of shared professional values informed and reinforced by occupational standards laid out in codes of ethics, procedural rules and guidelines further maintained through peer reviews (Trede, 2012; Evetts, 2014). In particular in blue light services, team based (on the job or simulated, hands on) learning has highlighted the role of socialisation in normalising the extreme demands of emergency work (Desmond, 2006, 2011; Turnbull and Wass, 2015). Those who have not gained experience hands on working in such teams are considered outsiders detached from the realities of the frontline service delivery experience (McCann and Granter, 2019). While the internal homogeneity of professional groups should not be overstated (Saks, 2015), such social groups and socially shared values, norms and ideals within them provide preferred frames of reference and evaluative standards for appropriate behaviour and professional conduct (e.g. Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978).

### *Professional prosocial values*

*Universalism versus benevolence values.* Professional prosocial values may be concerned with the direct beneficiaries of professional work or more abstract notions of the 'public' at large which, in following Schwartz (1994, 2012), can usefully be grouped into universalism or benevolence values.

**'Universalism' values** concern the welfare of others at a societal or global level. For professions and (expert) occupations in public service, this resonates with serving the public interest or the 'common good'

(Pfadenhauer, 2006; Rayner *et al.*, 2011) although the latter is a contested notion (Campbell and Marshall, 2005). Providing a particular service of public interest is what functionalists argue sets professions apart from other occupations and what critical accounts argued professions exploited to justify their sheltered status and privileges (Macdonald, 1995; Brock, Leblebici and Muzio, 2014). Codes of ethics and conduct sought to preserve the commitment of professions (and other expert occupations) to the 'public interest' (Crompton, 1990). This has also been encapsulated and associated with a belief that one's profession 'is vital for society at large' (Hall, 1968) in terms of 'making a strong contribution to society' (Kerr, Von Glinow and Schriesheim, 1977).

Ideological convictions by reforming governments as well as theoretical perspectives on professions have depicted these as inherently self-interested utility maximisers either devoid of regard for the (sometimes elusive) 'public interest' or as having only so much regard for this as it serves preservation of their status (Saks, 2010; Bach and Kessler, 2012b, p. 9). However, as previously argued, professional self-interest and the public interest may not always necessarily be at odds (Saks, 1995). In the context of aggressive cuts to the welfare state under austerity-driven public sector reform programmes, preserving breadth and types of services delivered by professionals which have already been subject to consecutive rounds of neoliberal reform over previous decades may well be seen in the public's as well as the professionals' interest (Evetts, 2003). Further standardisation of services in line with reformer's ideas as to how many resources should be made available to provide these could impede the quality of services (Noordegraaf and Steijn, 2013; Evetts, 2014).

Ultimately, the public interest cannot be treated as a homogenous entity. Occupations in public service might indeed be somewhat better attuned to the needs of citizen end users in their conception of 'the public interest' than the neoliberal reformer (Hosmer, 1995; Dunn, 2014). However, it would



appear that conflicting or diverging understandings of the public interest may have contributed to bringing professionals' motives into question.

Considering the 'public interest' to comprise contested, heterogeneous conceptualisations which no one (be that professions or reforming politicians) can universally claim to fully be able to discern, professions rather can become committed to their ideas of what serving the common good entails (Prebble, 2016).

While universalistic values in terms of serving the public interest relate to a larger, overarching, perhaps more abstract entity, **benevolence values** concern "preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the 'in-group')" (Schwartz, 1994, 2012, p. 7). In Schwartz's work this related to primary groups, such as the family. Within the context of (professional) work in public services, such values may correspond to service users. A desire to help others is concerned with seeking to have a positive effect on an individual service user, such as on their welfare, through work activities (Grant and Berg, 2012; Bozeman and Su, 2015). This value ('to help others') is, for instance, firmly engrained in the professional sense of purpose and ethos of occupations such as social work (Ponnert and Svensson, 2016) and to put the patient's welfare first in nursing (Carvalho, 2014; Olakivi and Niska, 2017). As well as serving the public interest, professional/occupational (codes of) ethics comprise shared understandings of how service should be rendered to individual service users and help be provided according to peer-agreed standards in order to maintain trust in the practitioner-client relation (e.g. Evetts, 2011, 2013, 2014; Semmer and Beehr, 2013; Ackroyd, 2016). These shared ethics (or morals) underpin discretionary street-level decision making in terms of deciding what is of greatest benefit to individual service users (or making 'moral assessments') and vary across occupational core tasks (Jensen, 2018).

*Altruism:* Regardless of how altruism is conceptualised (e.g. Schott et al., 2019) or whether altruistic motives logically exist (Le Grand, 2003b),

professional claims to altruism centre on having service users' or the public's interest at heart. This has been explained as deriving from social desirability and the requirement of such attitudes in order to preserve an occupation's special status and privileges (e.g. Freidson, 2001; Pfadenhauer, 2006; Alvesson, 2013; Leicht, 2016a; Olakivi and Niska, 2017). Altruism as a distinguishing 'trait' of professions compared to other expert occupations, however, is largely unsupported empirically (Saks, 2014).

In sociological literatures, altruism tends to be regarded as emanating from the moral principles concerned with 'ethical practice' (Bartol, 1979; Thunman, 2016). Altruism is generally discussed in terms of selflessness in putting the interests and benefit of individual service users or the public's before individual self-interest (e.g. Campbell and Marshall, 2005). Ethical or moral practice in putting individual clients and the public interest or common good above self-interest tend to be treated as a dichotomy of self- and other-interest (cf. Elliott, 1972, p. 94; Kerr, Von Glinow and Schriesheim, 1977; Bartol, 1979; De Vries, Dingwall and Orfali, 2009; Carr, 2014; Saks, 2014, 2016a).

Dismissal of altruistic values held by professionals and overemphasis on self-interest, nevertheless, distorts the extent to which neoliberal government reforms are driven by the interests of the most affluent (Dunn, 2014; Peck, 2014; Reed, 2018). Therefore it is not clear why governments' claims of 'knowing what is best for citizens' (see, for instance, Watson, 2017) would necessarily provide an unequivocally superior alternative to frontline professional ideas of the public or service user interests. In the light of the increasing neoliberalisation of and increasing influence of corporate interests over the welfare state, professionalism as highlighted in functionalist accounts and their portrayal of a prosocial professional concern with the public interest and service users is again to some extent seen as a potentially important anti-dote to these influences (Freidson, 2001; Ackroyd, 2016; Leicht, 2016a). As Crompton (1990, p. 156) has highlighted "norms of

'institutional altruism' do exist and [should] not completely [be] disregarded" in having protected "strong and weak" as well as against market forces.

The intention is not to paint an idealised picture of the motivations and values of professionals in public service. As previously highlighted, individuals may hold conflicting sets of values, which are dynamic, may be of equal importance or do not necessarily signify trade-offs, and may not necessarily result in behaviour conforming with these values (Locke, 1969; Kalleberg, 1977; Hitlin and Piliavin, 2004; Houston, 2011; Schwartz, 2012).

Nevertheless, it is conceivable that individuals hold some values seeking to benefit others or their understandings of 'the public interest', be that through professional socialisation into codes of ethics (Evetts, 2011, 2013) or 'innate' disposition (e.g. Bozeman and Su, 2015). Moreover, the more universal appeal of pro-social work values shared across sectors can coexist with self-interest, such as the need to subsist (Grant, 2007; Gallie, Felstead and Green, 2012; Prebble, 2016; Esser and Lindh, 2018; Gallie, 2019). If serving the public interest is merely conceptualised as an instrument for serving or protecting one's self-interest, this resonates with Etzioni's (1990, p. 28) caution that ascribing too general applicability to a concept can undermine its explanatory power in this concept then becoming the explanation for all phenomena, i.e. self-interest becomes a universal motive and explanation for behaviour. Such simplified depictions of the motives underpinning human behaviour have, however, been widely rejected (Le Grand, 2003b).

Strikingly, considering the economic centrality of work to people's lives and livelihoods (Muñoz de Bustillo *et al.*, 2009; George, 2011), intensified pressures on job quality more widely under global finance capitalism (Thompson, 2013) and on public sector employment in particular as a result of decades of neoliberal reform seeking to open this up to the competitive forces of the market and a cold fiscal climate under austerity, as argued in Chapter 2 (Worrall, Mather and Cooper, 2016; Reed, 2018), ascribing a moral element to 'self-interest' in pitting this against selfless acts of altruism

to some extent could be seen as disparaging what are legitimate material needs and concerns for better quality jobs. Neither overemphasising one motif over the other is adequately reflective of individuals' attitudes to work (Le Grand, 2003b; Prebble, 2016).

Prosocial motives conceptually provide a picture of the multiple reasons and ends individuals may (or may not actively) pursue in any given situation which ultimately show a concern for others but not in excluding self-interest (Grant and Berg, 2012). Where the welfare of others is protected without *intention* of personal benefit, prosocial motives may be altruistic. They may be self-interested where personal gain, such as positive affect (satisfaction), self-esteem, avoidance of punishment or material gains are the goals. Lastly, prosocial motives may be concerned with protecting ethical values or collective interest, such as group cohesion (Grant and Berg, 2012).

While there may be a situation specific conflict between other-interest and self-interest (Grant and Berg, 2012), neither, as has been proposed, is it fully accurate to depict self-interest and selflessness as competing or opposing ends of the spectrum; a preference for a high status job or autonomy is not inherently at odds with helping others or the good of society (Crompton, 1990; Scott, 2008). In simply doing one's job, both self-interest and other-interest may equally be realised (Le Grand, 2003b). Indeed, the gratefulness of service users and the wider public has been considered a rewarding aspect of work for professionals (Newman, 2013). Professionalism could therefore be described as comprising a "dualism' of self-interest and altruism" (Saks, 1995, p. 514; Kuhlmann, Allsop and Saks, 2009). Consumerist (marketizing) reforms have directly sought to enable the pursuit of material self-interest which professions were accused of (Freidson, 2001, p. 181).

It is not the relationship of values to observable behaviour and sincerity of motives that are of concern here, but rather how professions evaluate their

own occupational purpose and values which influence understandings of job characteristics. Whether or not individuals situationally act pro-socially is an empirical question, yet they may overall espouse other-interested (work) values. As Campbell and Marshall (2005, p. 204) have contended while “individual professionals do not always act altruistically, the ethos of a profession as a whole may be construed in this way – that is, to uphold certain values and standards of behaviour that should represent the norms of those who aspire to be members of that occupational group.” These other-interested/benefitting work values form part of a multiplicity of values providing evaluative standards which may conflict and not be linked to (observable) action.

### 3.5. Chapter conclusions

This chapter evaluated the extent to which occupational health and work design models could provide concepts useful for understanding how public sector professional jobs are experienced in their (social) context. The chapter introduced the main premises of the JD-R model as one such highly influential model which synthesises work-related stress and motivation theories to predict individual outcomes. It was proposed that the JD-R model in particular can provide a useful framework for considering characteristics of work and employment which is flexible and interdynamic and which provides the basis of further development of social meaning in particular work contexts.

As with other models theorising about individual functioning, the JD-R model is founded in particular assumptions about social reality which neglect the balance of power between employers and employees, social mechanisms, such as control and conflict, and the role of macro-level (e.g. economic, political) or meso-level (institutional) context. Even though JD-R is a useful

framing theory, it also was proposed that social mechanisms which recognise employer and employee relations should form part of wider theoretical framing. Such mechanisms contest potentially diverging interests (such as target-based performance control strategies, collective industrial action, professionalisation 'projects' or individual acts of resistance) but also areas of cooperation (such as a desire to serve the 'public interest'). Moreover, the institutional context within which jobs and workers' experiences are located must also be considered. In particular macro-level institutional change in the form of public sector reform measures (see Chapter 2) are pertinent to experiences of work and employment in public service occupations, as well as meso-level institutional facets of occupations or professions (e.g., occupational values which provide normative standards for behaviour).

The chapter concluded with a review of professional values suited to the study of public sector professions within the context of austerity-based reforms. Synthesising a number of perspectives, it was argued that, for occupations in public service, an occupation's purpose, nature of tasks and occupational identities influence not only value hierarchies, but crucially how these values are interpreted in relation to job characteristics and preferences thereof which manifest in understandings of professional practice. Professional socialisation and codes of conduct/ethics underpin such occupational interpretations translating professional values into practice and facilitating professions to contest control over characteristics of work and employment in contexts which challenge these values. The following chapter takes these propositions forward to develop research questions on how these concepts combine at the job-level in terms of job demands and resources, and the implications for individual outcomes.

## *Chapter 4. A job demands-resources framework for understanding experiences of professional work in a public sector reform context*

Chapter 3 proposed that the increasing dominance of psychology-centric theorising in employment relations can be addressed, to some degree, by offering an adaptation of the Job Demands-Resource (JD-R) model which acknowledges macro- and meso-level (institutional) context (e.g. political and occupational) and social mechanisms (e.g. professionalism). This can contribute to developing a more holistic understanding of individualistic phenomena situated in their social context, and specifically for this thesis, builds on the increasing influence of occupational health and work design models across wider job quality debates while critically interrogating managerial and other powerful interests.

The purpose of Chapter 4, therefore, is to develop an analytical framework which draws from the JD-R model as well as broader sociology (of work) and organisation literatures to supplement the organisational behaviour (OB) theory in which the JD-R is rooted. The conceptual framework proposed in this chapter allows further development of: (1) macro-level influences in terms of public sector reform under austerity, (2) meso-level influences in terms of professionalism (in particular professional identities and associated values), (3) how these combine at the job-level in terms of experiences of job demands and resources, and (4) what implications this has for individual job outcomes. Figure 4.1 provides an overall representation of the themes discussed in this chapter. The adaptation of the JD-R model draws on the discussion of the characteristics of neoliberal public sector reform measures in Chapter 2, namely structural reform and quantitative adjustment, pertinent to changes in the characteristics of work and employment in public service. Following JD-R logic, characteristics of work and employment can be viewed

both in positive (e.g. rewards, coping resources) and negative terms (job demands, i.e. sources of intensity/effort in work). The chapter proceeds in evaluating how each category is conceptualised in JD-R literatures before synthesising relevant literatures from the afore-indicated fields and disciplines to develop the categories' conceptual adaptation for the purposes of this thesis. This further involves the framing of working conditions as evaluated through the lens of a set of occupationally shared values. Both positive and negative individual job outcomes are discussed. The final section draws together the gaps in current understanding identified throughout the chapter to formulate four research questions to guide the structure and content of the remainder of the thesis.

#### 4.1. Macro-level influences on working conditions: Characteristics of the public sector reform context

Chapter 2 discussed the objectives of neoliberal public sector reform, the instruments by which these purposes are to be realised and the impact these have directly or indirectly had on characteristics of work and employment in public service under austerity, for instance, through direct pay cuts or freezes or through organisational restructuring. In order to understand experiences of working conditions in public service occupations, further consideration of this macro-level context is required to identify in what ways reforms come to shape job demands and resources.

As discussion in Chapter 2 has highlighted, macro-level influences, such as public sector reform along neoliberal principles, embody a reorganisation according to priorities extrinsic to the respective organisations (Harney, Fu and Freney, 2018). These can directly affect characteristics of work and employment or indirectly through organisational reorganisation (e.g. Parker,



Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017; Harney, Fu and Freeney, 2018). Considering the previous synthesis of literatures, the logics of 'economy', 'efficiency' and 'effectiveness' intertwine in neoliberal reform approaches. Efficiency-seeking reorganisation measures have seen, for instance, organisational mergers as means to shrink parts of the public sector workforce in tackling 'duplication', and effected through incentivised/voluntary or forced redundancies, hiring freezes or ratios for replacement of job leavers, or early retirement schemes. Efficiency in neoliberal reform terms further concerns increases in productivity by eliminating downtime and/or increasing output per employee (such as more cases to be processed, students to be taught and so forth) to increase 'value for money' in public expenditure. While such changes in themselves alter job demands (e.g. Harney, Fu and Freeney, 2018), evaluations of these are further subject to the influence of professional values. Reorganisation measures, and therefore public sector reform, may decrease job resources and/or increase (perceptions of) job demands thus shaping their effects on individual outcomes (Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017; Harney, Fu and Freeney, 2018).

Moreover, separating the effects of restructuring measures that have taken place following the GFC from those of preceding waves of public sector reform would not be a straightforward endeavour (Tailby, 2012; Vaughan-Whitehead, 2013). Reform trajectories continue from previous reforms and change takes place incrementally, though not necessarily in the same direction, and neither would a full reversal of previous reforms be possible (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017, pp. 215–216). Therefore, while taking care to decipher to some degree where possible the effects of public sector reform and austerity measures in the aftermath of the GFC on work and employment in public service, this thesis does not suggest structural determinism and as such neither straightforward or generalizable, causal links from macro-level reforms to individual experiences.

Against this context, the following sections explore in-depth the characteristics of work and employment, categorised into the conceptual dimensions of job demands and job resources, deemed pertinent for a framework to understand the experiences of public sector professional work. Each section begins by outlining key conceptual considerations for each dimension before considering the potential influence of macro-level context and professionalism, and implications for individual job outcomes.

## 4.2. Professional job demands in a public sector reform context

The following discussion is structured into three substantive parts. First, the concept of job demands as proposed in JD-R literatures is outlined as well as how this resonates with work intensity and effort as discussed in sociology of work literatures. Second, the potential effects of public sector reform on quantitative demands in public service occupations are subsequently addressed, before, third, identifying potential qualitative job demands professions in public service may face.

### 4.2.1. Overview: Conceptualising job demands

Job demands in JD-R literature refer to tasks, as the “things that have to be done” (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004, p. 296), and aspects relating to these as well as a broader variety of characteristics of work and employment residing beyond the task level. Job demands as such concern those aspects of the job which require effort (i.e. dispensing energy) and while they are not inherently negative, these may become strenuous where this effort is excessive or beyond an individual’s ability to cope (Demerouti and Bakker, 2011). Job demands then can become stressors (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004) and relate to “those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the

job that require sustained physical or mental effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs (e.g., exhaustion)” (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001, p. 501). Stressors over time evoke strain, namely affective, behavioural and physical ‘stress reactions’, and as such correspond to negative individual outcomes (Sonnentag and Frese, 2012). Stress has variously been conceptualised, such as in terms of a physiological state, also in response to threatening or exciting stimuli, an adverse reaction to excessive pressure or other demands, or as an interaction or ‘deficit/discrepancy’ between person and environment (Hobfoll, 1989; HSE, 2008; Sonnentag and Frese, 2012). Generally, it has been seen as the psychological process which connects exposure to stressors (e.g. pressure) to the outcomes of stress reactions, namely strain (Pearlin and Bierman, 2013, pp. 326–327; Arnold *et al.*, 2020, pp. 326–327). JD-R theory stipulates that job demands should only come to have negative (i.e. health depleting) effects if the effort required is high and few coping resources are available, such as time for recovery (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014). High job demands have been linked to numerous negative health and wellbeing outcomes (Harney, Fu and Freeney, 2018) and thus low job quality (OECD, 2013; Eurofound, 2017).

The association between job demands and wellbeing, however, is not always negative (Crawford, Lepine and Rich, 2010) indicating the need to reflect on thresholds in their levels, or non-linear relations with wellbeing (Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2013). Such findings challenge purely additive effects on outcomes as well as the conditions giving rise to the salience of how these are experienced positively or negatively. For example, work intensity up to a certain level has been thought of as beneficial in preventing boredom but as negatively taxing on individual wellbeing after such a threshold (Eurofound, 2012c). It has since been suggested that understanding the type as well as level of job demands may also be relevant for the relationship with wellbeing (Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2013). Similarly, within sociological traditions social

mechanisms resonate with how sources of intensity in work are experienced (Granter *et al.*, 2019).

For professions, structural conditions which shape the significance of work intensity, how they come to be experienced either positively or negatively as job demands, and by which mechanisms these experiences are either worsened or mitigated, include for example, socialisation into an occupation during training or on the job (Dierdorff, 2019). As was previously argued in Chapter 3, this can influence whether sources of intensity in work might even be valued sources of meaning, such as physical demands in emergency work (Desmond, 2006; Turnbull and Wass, 2015; Granter *et al.*, 2019), and whether these conflict with an occupations' identity or as originating from 'alien intrusions', such as managerial prerogative, and therefore deemed illegitimate (Braedley, 2015; Noordegraaf, 2015; McCann and Granter, 2019; Chen, Currie and McGivern, 2021). Taking into account the relational context of work, such as professionalism as offering a potential 'community of coping' (Korczynski, 2003; Beck and Brook, 2020), thus may help further understand job challenge or hindrance demands.

Job demands pertain to quantitative (workloads and time pressures) and qualitative (psychological and physical) aspects of the job associated with pressure and effort in work (van Veldhoven, 2014; Zapf *et al.*, 2014). The following discussion combines both dimensions with a reflection on potential influences emanating from the macro-level context and meso-level of the profession.

## 4.2.2. Quantitative job demands: Work intensity and extensification

### *Intensity in workload and pace and job demands*

Workloads may be experienced as demanding where these require additional or excessive effort, that is effort which exceeds an individual's coping capacity and ability to recover (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014). The quantitative demands of workloads may intensify work effort in requiring a higher speed of work, tighter deadlines or less time to get tasks done before deadlines (Eurofound, 2017). This may further reduce the porosity of the working day, reduce the ability to take breaks and, at the more severe end of such increases, may lead to 'role overload' where there is insufficient time to get all tasks done (Green, 2006; Westgaard and Winkel, 2011). 'Role overload' may be experienced when the amount of work exceeds the time available to do it (Boxall and Macky, 2014).

Organisational downsizing or restructuring for efficiency in particular in public services has been linked to reports of greater work intensity for staff (Di Nunzio *et al.*, 2009; Eurofound, 2015, pp. 95–7; Harney, Fu and Freeney, 2018), with managers, professionals, and technicians more prone to experiencing such reorganisation (Eurofound, 2017, pp. 96–7). Reorganisation seeking efficiencies have characterised downtime as 'wastage' to be addressed through new work practices, such as 'lean' principles targeted at doing 'more with less' (Carter *et al.*, 2013b). Through workforce multiskilling, it is argued that fewer workers are needed to complete all tasks which further is seen as reducing downtime. An inability to take sufficient breaks, for instance, has been linked to negative health outcomes (Carter *et al.*, 2013a). Higher workloads following public sector restructuring have been observed, in particular where such measures sought to prevent redundancies in eliminating slack but even more so where workforce reductions have led to understaffing and redistribution of tasks

(Flecker and Hermann, 2011; Eurofound, 2012a, p. 53; Vaughan-Whitehead, 2013, p. 24). Increases in workload in certain parts of the public services, e.g. through higher client numbers, has reduced job satisfaction, not solely as a result of work intensification but also because of the effects this has had on service standards deliverable within shorter amounts of time (Hoggett, 1996; Flecker, Krenn and Tschernitz, 2014). Professional commitment to clients and service delivery were used as bases for consent to higher workloads (Green, 2006, chap. 4).

Where increases in work effort are unmet by rewards, this skews the perceived effort-reward balance potentially fostering negative attitudes to work (Siegrist, 1996; Guest, 2008). In particular considering that professionalization efforts centred on the premise that more skills and tasks were to be rewarded financially, placing such rewards simultaneously under strain may compound negative individual experiences (e.g. Kessler, Heron and Dopson, 2015; McCann and Granter, 2019).

Various types of control, especially those paired with technology, have been associated with an intensification of work effort (Green, 2006, p. 77; Felstead *et al.*, 2019). This concerns both technical and bureaucratic types of control (Callaghan and Thompson, 2001). Workloads also may increase through the demands placed on workers to satisfy the administrative burden associated with performance monitoring (e.g. Thompson and van den Broek, 2010) and cognitive demands of extensive sets of rules and procedures (e.g. Callaghan and Thompson, 2001).

### *Work intensification and job demands*

Increases in work effort as a result of rationalisation and efficiency seeking changes to work organisation, or doing more with less can further spill into extensions of working time (e.g. Vaughan-Whitehead, 2013; Turnbull and Wass, 2015). Indeed, organisational restructuring has been associated with greater work intensity as well as atypical work patterns, namely in this case

long hours as well as shift work and less regular daily or weekly working times (Eurofound, 2012a, p. 61). Extensions of working time may concern, for instance, increases in days or hours worked (e.g. Eurofound, 2012a, p. 61). This can either take place in the form of employers formally seeking to extend contractual weekly working hours (Hermann, 2014; Eurofound, 2015, pp. 75–76) or informally as workloads spill into time beyond contractual arrangements such as days otherwise deemed off work or general overtime after shifts (European Commission, 2013; Lang, Clauwaert and Schömann, 2013; OECD, 2013; Vaughan-Whitehead, 2013). Increases in working time may negatively affect activities outside of work, work-life-balance and opportunities to recover (e.g. OECD, 2013; Boxall and Macky, 2014). The sectors the most affected by increases in working time during the more immediate years following the GFC, findings from the fifth EWCS indicate that “more than 20% of workers in education, health, other services and financial services report[ed] an increase in working time over the previous year.” (Eurofound, 2012b, p. 37).

### 4.2.3. Qualitative job demands: Cognitive, emotional and physical demands

Qualitative job demands concern cognitive, emotional, social aspects of work which can be referred to as psychosocial demands (Zapf *et al.*, 2014). Cognitive work demands can arise from conflicting, a lack of or delay in receiving information or feedback on how to carry a work task out (Zapf *et al.*, 2014) and connect to knowledge characteristics of work (Morgeson and Humphrey, 2006). As well as quantitative increases in the amount of tasks, aspects of the nature of these tasks may further prove problematic considering professional values.

Public service jobs inherently by virtue of the relational nature of service work involve contact with service users or the wider public. Professionalised occupations have traditionally been discussed as able to define client/service user problems, which were deemed legitimate and the rules and practices surrounding how to remedy these problems (Suddaby and Viale, 2011). As noted in Chapter 2, neoliberal reform over the past few decades has sought to transform such profession-service user relations by seeking to introduce measures attempting to emulate market-like relations, including individualised funding arrangements, accountability mechanisms seeking to remedy information asymmetry between service providers and users, strengthening managerial oversight, and a redefinition of standards and quality based on quantitative outputs and metrics than practitioner notions of quality. These elements in relation to psychosocial job demands in professional public service work are further evaluated, followed by physical demands in a context of professional values and identities.

### *Psychosocial intensity in work and job demands*

Psychosocial risks are pertinent to service work involving “close contact with the public, such as public administration, health, education and transport” (Muñoz de Bustillo *et al.*, 2009, p. 142). In jobs which require dealing with angry clients, hiding personal feelings, being in situations which are emotionally disturbing and/or where there may be a conflict between personal values and job tasks, psychosocial risks may be particularly pronounced (OECD, 2013; Eurofound, 2017). Exposure to, for example, harassment, social undermining, and aggression can pose psychosocial demands associated with negative individual health and wellbeing outcomes (Muñoz de Bustillo *et al.*, 2009, p. 142; Semmer and Beehr, 2013).

Four relational aspects of work are important to consider in regard to sources of psychosocial demands in public service. First, supervisors or management can be sources of harassment which are considered social job demands



(Semmer and Beehr, 2013). This can be in the form of bullying (which permeates all of the following), verbal abuse and/or aggression, constant disagreement and arguing, social undermining in seeking to embarrass an individual, such as by questioning their competence or attacking their reputation, also for reasons of self-aggrandisement, and in making social relations with others difficult (Semmer and Beehr, 2013). In restructured workplaces, it has been suggested that these are increasingly subjected to some form of performance monitoring under tightened managerial control, and that this increased managerial control is associated with negative individual outcomes (Eurofound, 2012a, 2015; van der Kolk, ter Bogt and van Veen-Dirks, 2015). A higher incidence of reported bullying and bad management behaviour has been reported in restructured workplaces (Eurofound, 2012a, p. 53). Autocratic management styles can also further diminish job resources such as autonomy (van der Kolk, ter Bogt and van Veen-Dirks, 2015). Negative experiences of such managerial oversight may further be compounded where the management cadre has been formed by recruits from outside the profession who do not share the same understanding of quality and professional practice and are therefore considered unqualified to make judgements about professional work (e.g. Ackroyd, 2013; McCann and Granter, 2019).

Second, further interactional (or social) aspects of jobs, in the same vein as relations with management, may relate positively and negatively to individual job outcomes (Semmer and Beehr, 2013). The outward focus of work in, for instance, dealing with patients, service users, or students forms a central part of the daily experience of work for those in the traditionally service-intense public sector (European Commission, 2013, p. 30). Relations with citizens, service users or 'customers' also act as both positive sources of meaning and recognition in work but also as sources of emotional intensity in work, generally (Heuven *et al.*, 2006; Bakker and Sanz-Vergel, 2013; Granter *et al.*, 2019).

The negative effects of emotional labour in terms of, for instance, which emotions to show or if at all in various types of service work, including, for instance, teaching and firefighting, on worker wellbeing have been documented (Heuven *et al.*, 2006; Thurnell-Read and Parker, 2008; Chowdhry, 2014). However, the role of management in shaping and influencing employees' experiences of interactions with end users (e.g. Bélanger and Edwards, 2013) appears more widely discussed and acknowledged specifically in critical accounts. This, for instance, relates to the reconceptualization of public service users as empowered 'customers' or 'citizen consumers' (see Chapter 2) (Rosenthal and Peccei, 2006).

As public sector organisations re-orientate along market-based ideas, such as measures to capture efficiency and 'value for money' (e.g. Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017, p. 10), the relationship between professionals and the people they serve directly or the wider public in terms of the profession's socially valued status may be redefined (Evetts, 2018; McCann and Granter, 2019). In particular, services which become commoditised, a fixed unit exchanged for funding, may be experienced as negative. Professional judgements about what service is to be provided to whom and what standards are to be met in this work may be replaced by service user demands expressed, for instance, through surveys or public service provider 'choice' under individualised funding arrangements (Horton, 2006; Crouch, 2009; Evetts, 2014).

Such shifts away from the purpose of a profession and its socially valued status erode this rewarding aspect of professional work (Evetts, 2009; Newman, 2013; Leicht, 2016a; Noordegraaf, 2016; McCann and Granter, 2019). Neoliberal reform agendas have over past decades sought to capitalise on generating public distrust in public service professions in order to generate consent to reform and cuts by bringing their motives to work into question (Lethbridge, 2011). Public servants have been depicted as akin to "parasitic" drains on public budgets (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2012, p. 120).

In addition, in the context of cuts to welfare and social programmes under austerity as outlined in Chapter 2, social interactions with service users in hospitals or job centres may have become increasingly strained owing to increasingly scarce resources and support (see, for instance, Grimshaw and Rubery, 2012). This may correspond to reports of those working in public services increasingly finding themselves subjected to angry end users, in particular in education and the health sector, since 2010 (Eurofound, 2017, p. 51). But also, in particular for those with strong prosocial values, not being able to help might be associated with frustration and emotional demands (Noesgaard and Hansen, 2017). Yet, while social stressors (or demands) generally are considered hindrance demands (Semmer and Beehr, 2013), some research has suggested that the emotional demands may yet act as challenge rather than hindrance demands depending on occupational sector, such as the emotional demands for nurses of not being able to help patients (Bakker and Sanz-Vergel, 2013).

Third, tasks are perceived as psychologically demanding when employees object, for example, on grounds of conflicting moral values or because these tasks may be seen as outside of their role (Zapf *et al.*, 2014). This is referred to as 'role conflict'. A widening of skills palettes and job roles may reflect a dilution of a profession's core purpose and standards (e.g. Davies and Thomas, 2003; Braedley, 2015; McCann and Granter, 2019). Tasks seen as alien to the profession, such as paperwork associated with capturing data for performance measurement to enable scrutiny from external authorities, may be negatively perceived and require additional effort in complying with these demands (e.g. Hupe and van der Kogt, 2013). Such targets and performance monitoring mechanisms enforced from above conflict with occupational "behavioural norms, judgements and value systems" (Worrall, Mather and Seifert, 2010, p. 127) and deflect away from core work priorities (Bach and Kessler, 2008; Crouch, 2009). In addition, as these tasks may conflict with professional ideas, rather than mere compliance, there may also be resistance to carrying these tasks out as demanded (Thunman, 2016).

Lastly, considering that entry into a profession is usually characterised by a comparatively lengthy education or training period (Noordegraaf, 2015), changes in tasks which have not been associated with some degree of training or measures to otherwise gain the experience and skills needed to complete them may foster feelings of a lack of competence (McCann *et al.*, 2013; McCann and Granter, 2019). These represent further psychological (cognitive or physical) job demands.

### *Physical intensity in work and job demands*

Physical demands refer to those aspects of the environment that involve physical aspects of carrying out work tasks, such as physical load (lifting weights); strenuous, repetitive or tiring body positions and movements; noise; extreme or uncomfortable temperatures; vibrations; as well as chemical or biological factors, such as exposure to poisonous gases, smoke or bacteria (Muñoz de Bustillo *et al.*, 2009; OECD, 2013, p. 166; Zapf *et al.*, 2014). However, shared social meanings of physical demands may shape whether these are viewed negatively or positively among members of a profession (Semmer and Beehr, 2013). For instance, for firefighters where physical demands come together with a general high intensity of work, this is considered to contribute to experiencing a sought after 'rush' as well as a sense of achievement and competence to prove oneself as capable in the face of extreme conditions (Desmond, 2006). While physical demands are generally thought of as hindrance demands, depending on the occupation these can also represent challenge demands, for instance, where training fostered a sense of mastery and pride is taken in being able to endure and cope with physical demands and (Zapf *et al.*, 2014; Granter *et al.*, 2019).

## 4.3. Professional job resources in a public sector reform context

This section begins by reviewing the concept of ‘job resources’ as defined in the JD-R model, highlighting its conceptual limitations. A reformulation of the notion of ‘job resources’ from a pluralistic, worker centric perspective is presented, drawing on themes discussed in previous chapters to identify job resources relevant to public sector professions. Chapter 3 argued that professional orientations to work reflected strong values of extrinsic rewards, autonomy, collegial cohesion in the maintenance of standards, and altruism (Hall, 1968; Kerr, Von Glinow and Schriesheim, 1977; Bartol, 1979; Morrow and Goetz, 1988; Olakivi and Niska, 2017). As such, the discussion here then goes on to analyse these values’ dynamic with public sector reform and the implications for job resources at three levels; extrinsic, social and intrinsic resources. These are discussed in descending order of those aspects in professional employment relations seen to provide social resources; institutional arrangements, work organisation, and intrinsic job characteristics.

### 4.3.1. Overview: Conceptualising job resources

#### *Definition and critique*

As Chapter 3 summarised, occupational health and work design models conceptualize job resources as those aspects of a job which enable coping with job demands. Psychological research more broadly focused on explaining stress has examined ‘coping resources’ available to individuals in the face of threatening or challenging situations or events (see, for example, Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Hobfoll, 1989; Richter, 2000; Hobfoll *et al.*,

2018). Coping resources can pertain to “objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies” (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 516). These can, for example, span personal resources or resources offered by the work context. Stress might arise if these characteristics are lacking in a job to help cope with job demands (Demerouti *et al.*, 2000). Job resources have subsequently been conceptualised as characteristics of jobs that alleviate the psychological or physiological effort associated with job demands (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). This has also been theorised as the ‘buffering hypothesis’ (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). In other words, job resources are postulated to be able to reduce some of the potentially negative individual experiences of working.

The underlying direct positive association of job resources with individual outcomes has been referred to as the ‘motivational process’ (Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli, 2003; Bakker and Bal, 2010). Motivation is seen as emanating from job resources in that these are considered to “foster the willingness to dedicate one’s efforts and abilities to the work task” (Bakker, Albrecht and Leiter, 2011a, p. 6) where these are plenty and considered adequately rewarding for effort put into achieving work tasks (Siegrist, 1996; Meijman and Mulder, 1998). In particular where a lot of effort has to be spent on achieving work tasks, it is argued that rewards available (or resources) become more important (Hakanen and Roodt, 2010) which is somewhat reminiscent of IR literatures’ ‘wage-effort-bargain’ (e.g. Gall and Hebdon, 2008; Edwards and Hodder, 2022). Psychological states or need satisfaction, such as those proposed by Hackman and Oldham (1976) or Ryan and Deci (2000), have been cited as explanations for the mechanisms through which the ‘motivational process’ links job resources with positive individual job wellbeing outcomes. Job resources’ potential in stimulating personal growth, learning and development was argued to relate to ‘intrinsic motivation’ (through basic psychological need satisfaction), whereas their instrumental

functionality in achieving organisationally-defined work goals is seen to relate to 'extrinsic motivation' (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008; Bakker and Bal, 2010). Combining motivational as well as stress theories, job resources have subsequently in JD-R literatures been conceptualised as,

*“those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that may be functional in achieving work goals; reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; or stimulate personal growth and development” (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501).*

There is ongoing debate, however, first, over how job resources relate to job demands, such as whether these need to be 'matched' by type to be able to reduce the negative effects of job demands (de Jonge, Demerouti and Dormann, 2014), and second, when, why, and for whom job resources come to be experienced positively, i.e. as resources, or even negatively (van Veldhoven *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, questions have been raised over the appropriateness of assuming essentially additive effects in job resources, namely whether (some) resources have a non-linear association with positive individual outcomes, plateau or reach a 'tipping point' in their positive effects to become negatively experienced, such that the more of them may not universally be the better.

The JD-R model is a heuristic and does not *ex ante* specify what the demands and resources of a job are (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014). Empirical studies have thus used a broad range of different concepts to correspond to these two categories of working conditions and to explain their interactions (*ibid*). Conventional definitions of job resources describe their effects on (primarily organisational) outcomes of interest rather than a definition centring on what these are (or must be) to have such effects. Any aspect of the job, be this “physical, psychological, social, or organizational” (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001, p. 501), that could have these effects and is not a challenge demand could thus be classified as a job resource (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). This introduces ambiguity and highlights that the dimension of working

conditions referring to 'job resources' denotes an empirical concept, assumed to exist based on large quantities of empirical observations of observer or self-rated job characteristics which statistically 'fit' into this category (cf Demerouti *et al.*, 2001).

This point also illustrates further issues with the dominant philosophical paradigm in work psychology (see also Chapters 3 and 5 for related discussions) which rests on unitarist assumptions and a disregard for human agency beyond how this contributes to an assumed mutually beneficial employment relationship (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014). For example, agency can be seen in concepts such as 'job crafting' and 'resource gain/loss spirals', and subjectivities, such as 'values', self-belief or 'personalities', all of which are amenable to management interventions (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009a; Gorgievski, Halbesleben and Bakker, 2011; Demerouti, Bakker and Fried, 2012; Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017; Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). Subjectivities, recognising agency, and agents as social beings clearly are relevant as efforts to integrate these into the JD-R model themselves highlight. Yet, these arguments also illustrate problematic causal assumptions embedded in the model. Working conditions are viewed as the start of a causal chain (Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017), with job resources specifically as "the most important causes of a motivational process" (van Veldhoven *et al.*, 2020, p. 13). This implies some degree of determinism that would appear contradictory to simultaneously specifying volition in job resources' effects, namely arguments that "job resources initiate motivation (i.e., the voluntary initiation of action to achieve goals)" (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017, p. 278). Ultimately, this to some degree reduces workers and their subjectivities to that of objects which can be manipulated to behave in certain ways (Godard, 2014) which purportedly benefit both the organisation and individual. Furthermore, assuming 'motivation' as the universal link between individuals working to carry out organisationally defined tasks further may incorrectly attribute this link to a positive conceptualisation of 'motivation' whereas individuals might instead



merely be “constrained to do [so] by physical and social necessity” (Thompson and McHugh, 2009, p. 316).

### *Reconceptualising ‘job resources’*

A pluralist adaptation of the JD-R model rooted in a broader ER framing requires the model’s conceptual dimension of ‘job resources’ to be re-evaluated and expanded. This adaptation needs to be cognisant of their significance in the social relations surrounding work and employment (Atkinson, 2009; Vincent *et al.*, 2020); relations which the concepts used to analyse these experiences thus need to reflect. Considering that paid work can be understood as the “activities performed within internal social relations structuring the sphere of necessity” (Karlsson, 2004, p. 96), this requires that the following considerations are addressed in the redefinition of ‘job resources’.

Firstly, the vast majority of people are economically and socially constrained to engage in paid work to maintain their livelihoods (Reed, 1997; Thompson and McHugh, 2009, p. 316). Secondly, these activities, carried out within the sphere of necessity (i.e. paid work), are structured by relational aspects (Karlsson, 2004). These social relations bestow certain resources to agents, which can be thought of or understood as privileges or conditions for action, and thus which contain some varying degree of power (i.e. capacity for influence) (Manicas, 2007). Social theories have variously conceptualised these. Bourdieu and Bourdieusian-inspired research, for example, employs the notion of ‘capitals’ to identify and refer to such sources of power in social relations (Atkinson, 2010; Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011; Suddaby and Viale, 2011; Hebson, Rubery and Grimshaw, 2015).

Thus to be *resourceful*, ‘job resources’, in any given job, need to contain (potential and actual) sources of power (related to the sphere of paid work) for workers to maintain, or better, the material and other nonmaterial working conditions (or rewards) that are conferred by, or obtainable from, the position

of the job within wider social relations. Power in the context of paid work concerns the potential for influence and change accessible to workers (e.g. Porter, 2000; Edwards and Hodder, 2022), residing within their working conditions, wider context of work and themselves, which need not necessarily actualise in any given context (e.g. Sayer, 2004). This influence may only be very marginal, but never completely absent, because of the inherent indeterminacy of labour; without which efforts to develop models of job productivity, such as the JD-R model itself, would be redundant as 'soft tools of persuasion' (Thompson and Harley, 2008).

Without a notion of power, neither the employment relationship, as founded in the constraint of the economic exchange of potential/actual labour power within certain social relations, and strategies to shape this to one over another social group's favour, nor agential volition, such as in JD-R literatures, 'the voluntary initiation of action to achieve goals' (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017, p. 278), can be understood as necessary conditions for resources' postulated effects relating to paid work to manifest. Volition implies the power to resist and choose, (though with no suggestion that agreeable choices are necessarily available) as opposed to determinism which implies the absence of any such power (Harley, 2019).

Therefore, this thesis defines job resources as favourable aspects of work and employment, within the sphere of necessity (i.e. *paid* work), which offer material and nonmaterial rewards related to an occupation's position within social relations. These are imbued with varying degrees of power, i.e. the potential for influence over, or maintenance of, these relations and associated working conditions, the nature of the employment relationship (including contractual arrangements and regulative environments) or a job's position across occupational hierarchies. These are further associated with normative frameworks through which the material and immaterial rewards obtainable from and in work are agentially deliberated and accepted, maintained or sought to be changed (Archer, 2007, pp. 17–22; O'Mahoney

and Vincent, 2014). For example, members of an occupation share a similar understanding of the requirements of a job upon which their behaviour and work practice is based and may thus seek to influence the tasks spanning their professional role according to this interpretation, as well as how these are to be carried out (Dierdorff, 2019; Chen, Currie and McGivern, 2021).

Considering the imbalance of power between employers, employees, and their collective interest representation institutions (see Chapter 3), instrumental job resources concern those characteristics of work and employment with potential for having a positive impact on workers' ability to negotiate a more favourable effort-reward bargain. That is, to change other working conditions, through collective or group-led and individual mechanisms (e.g. Green, 2005; Gallie, 2013; Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017; Simms, 2017; O'Brady and Doellgast, 2021). At the group level these may, for instance, concern trade union negotiated decreases in job demands, such as workloads, or increases in job resources, such as extrinsic rewards from work. Professionalisation-driven increases in job resources (such as in task variety or improvements in training provisions) and likewise, reductions in job demands (such as reductions in role ambiguity through standardisation of procedures and codes of conduct), may constitute another collective-group-level mechanism (Evetts, 2014; Williams and Koumenta, 2020). At the individual level, autonomy (or 'job control') has been discussed as a direct form of participation (Gallie, 2013), though for professionalised occupations this may again reside at the level of the occupation (Exworthy, Hyde and McDonald-Kuhne, 2016). Such a conceptualisation of job resources is cognisant of structural relations as a necessary condition (Tsoukas, 2000; Manicas, 2007) for them to be instrumental in alleviating unfavourable working conditions.

Job resources thus concern those aspects of work and employment which enable shaping or improving (unfavourable) working conditions – beyond yet including 'coping' through psychological mechanisms – and how these are

experienced. These are interpreted through the normative frameworks associated with an occupation's social position and inter-dynamically related to individual wellbeing.

In JD-R literature, job resources span beyond those job characteristics traditionally discussed in work design debates, to include not just intrinsic but also extrinsic job rewards (Bakker *et al.*, 2003; Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2008). Job resources can be separated into intrinsic and extrinsic resources (Bakker *et al.*, 2003), whereby social resources span these two levels. Therefore, subsequent sections of this chapter are organised to follow a descending logic in the levels at which job resources in public service professions may be located. This discussion brings together perspectives from the various disciplines which have informed debates in the field of IR, and job quality literatures in particular, as well as work and organisational psychology.

### 4.3.2. Extrinsic job resources

Characteristics of the employment relationship or rewards extrinsic to the job have not been a traditional focus of study in job design as “remuneration and career opportunities are not pure job characteristics as such” (Daniels, Le Blanc and Davis, 2014, p. 78). Similarly, sociological perspectives examining job satisfaction and the quality of jobs have emphasised the importance of intrinsic characteristics of work in offering the potential for meaning and fulfilment from work more so than extrinsic job characteristics (Gallie, 2007b). Yet, for most people there is an economic imperative to make a living and as such extrinsic rewards, such as remuneration and continuity therein through job (status) security, are important (Green, 2006; George, 2011; Kalleberg, 2016).

Extrinsic job characteristics pertaining to some aspects of the employment relationship are encapsulated in the JD-R model as job resources at the organisational-level, e.g. pay, job security, career opportunities (e.g. Bakker *et al.*, 2003; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Considering that extrinsic job resources connect to characteristics of employment, namely those embedded in contracts or collective agreements, these thus cover elements of what Daniels (2006) refers to as the 'institutionalised' aspects of job characteristics. Especially as far as public service jobs are concerned, extrinsic job resources are not necessarily determined at the organizational level. For instance, collective bargaining for terms and conditions may take place at the national level (Bach and Bordogna, 2013; European Commission, 2013). Moreover, fiscal retrenchment measures under austerity have to some extent seen a bypassing of such agreements where states unilaterally implemented public sector cuts or freezes to wages and jobs (Glassner, 2010; Bach and Bordogna, 2013).

The significance of extrinsic rewards further has been debated in the sociology of the professions. It is in the realm of extrinsic rewards that opinions on the importance of such rewards are split in perspectives on the professions. Critical perspectives have argued that professions exploited their sheltered status (in terms of professional self-regulation) to obtain certain privileges, such as extrinsic rewards (Macdonald, 1995; Brock, Leblebici and Muzio, 2014). Functionalists, however, viewed professions as perhaps interested in maintaining a certain social status, which also served as a source of meaning in their work in terms of recognition and appreciation, but nonetheless professionals were seen as primarily highly dedicated to the intrinsic meaning they could derive from their work (Freidson, 2001, p. 108) whereby "[w]ork is defined as an end in itself and not means to an end" (Snizek, 1972, p. 110). Less importance was thought to be put on material rewards as a result of this 'sense of calling' to their field and in placing great centrality to work in their lives (Hall, 1968).

The following subsections address the relevance of pay, pensions and (contractual) working time arrangements as well as job security as extrinsic job rewards in public service professional jobs in the light of austerity.

### *Terms and conditions: Pay, pensions and contractual working time arrangements*

#### *Pay and pensions*

Broadly, social science disciplines have recognised and debated the importance of financial rewards for job quality. Although financial rewards in work design literatures are sometimes cited as an example of job resources (e.g. Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007, 2017), pay and other such financial rewards seldom feature analyses of job characteristics within the JD-R, especially where work engagement as a beneficial individual outcome is measured (George, 2011; Kulikowski and Sedlak, 2020).

Research has suggested a lack of an association between increasing material wealth (affluence) and job satisfaction (Guest, 2008). It was concluded that (non-performance contingent) pay in itself generally had limited or fleeting motivational potential beyond a certain threshold (or balance of effort and reward) in terms of its correlation with work engagement, performance or effects on increasing job satisfaction (Cooke, Donaghey and Zeytinoglu, 2013; Bakker and Demerouti, 2014; Guest, 2014; Kulikowski and Sedlak, 2020).

As far as broader evaluations of the quality of a job are concerned, the level and stability of economic income through pay has been recognised as a reasonably consistent indicator (Kalleberg, 2016). Pensions connect to future financial stability and income (Guest, 2017).

Across job quality, employment relations and work psychology/JD-R literatures there is consistency in thinking about the adequacy of pay. This

concerns the wage-effort-bargain (e.g. Gall and Hebdon, 2008; Edwards and Hodder, 2022) or effort-reward-imbalance (ERI) (Siegrist, 1996). The former has been considered as the central source of conflict within the employment relationship in that “workers [are] wanting to work less (intensively or extensively) for more pay and better terms of employment while employers want to pay less in remuneration for more intensive or extensive work” (Gall and Hebdon, 2008, p. 590). Similarly, financial rewards in psychological literatures have been examined in terms of the perceived fairness or adequacy of rewards in line with the propositions made by the ERI model (Siegrist, 1996). However, in these literatures, effort-reward-imbalance is not recognised to lead to conflict but merely negative attitudinal outcomes, such as job dissatisfaction (*ibid*).

Professionalization efforts by some occupations in public services, such as firefighters and paramedics, rested on government insistence and/or union demands that financial rewards, namely pay increases, were to be awarded for upskilling (Seifert and Sibley, 2011; McCann *et al.*, 2013). Arguably, reforms which have taken place against the backdrop of austerity seeking ‘to do more with less’ (Molina and O’Shea, 2020) could be considered to have increased the work effort required of individuals, while simultaneously freezing or cutting public sector pay (Lodge and Hood, 2012). Not only can this be expected to have implications for a perceived breach of pre-existing public sector wage-effort bargains (or indeed the psychological contract) (OECD, 2012, pp. 11–12), this may further be aggravated in that increased job requirements in terms of skills or effort are connected to increased compensation requirements by individuals (Green, 2006; Morgeson and Humphrey, 2006). Problems may further arise considering the circumvention of collective voice mechanisms where wage cuts or freezes were unilaterally implemented by governments, such as in the UK, without consultation of, for instance, trade unions (Bach, 2019).

The adequacy or perceived fairness of pay and other rewards are subject to norms and a shared understanding of what would be considered fair; therefore members of a profession are likely to share understanding of its social status reinforced by trade unionism or collective bargaining arrangements (Green, 2006; Scheuer, 2013). Considering a sense of being equal among colleagues based on a shared area of expertise (Reed, 1997), perceptions of fairness may further depend on this sense of equality among colleagues. As Salancik and Pfeffer (1978, p. 246) put it, "Pay is a complex aspect of work, serving not only to justify the activity but also to convey worth, status, and competence, as well as to provide for various goods and services obtained outside of work". Given the primacy of resource loss for individual outcomes (Hobfoll, 1989), and as far as professionalism as portrayed in conflict perspectives is concerned, public sector pay freezes and cuts thus not only threaten valued job resources, but also potentially undermine a profession's sense of its socially valued status.

#### *Working time arrangements*

Considering the strong institutional influence over working time affecting contractual arrangements, such as the European Union's Working Time Directive (Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017), this characteristic of employment perhaps may be deemed less adaptable at the organisational level. Occupational health and work design models tend to emphasise an individuals' need for recovery from work effort (Meijman and Mulder, 1998; Demerouti *et al.*, 2009) but less so discuss this in the context of actual arrangements surrounding working time, such as weekly work hours. Considering the connection of weekly working hours to time available to recover (van Veldhoven, 2008) and to the quality of life outside of work, the negligence of (contractual/actual) weekly working hours in models explicitly focused on explaining the interdynamic of how the sphere of work affects the sphere of family life and vice versa (e.g. ten Brummelhuis and Bakker, 2012) needs to be addressed. Instead, this aspect of employment with potential



links to positive wellbeing outcomes tends to be acknowledged more explicitly in wider job quality literatures (cf Muñoz de Bustillo *et al.*, 2009, 2011).

Working schedules and control thereof allowing workers to enjoy a work-life balance are generally considered favourable to positive wellbeing outcomes (Kalleberg, 2016). Atypical, irregular working times, on the other hand, have been linked to negative physical health outcomes, such as cardio-vascular disease (Eurofound, 2017). Unfavourable working time arrangements (e.g., ‘unsocial’ hours such as weekends or nights, frequently alternating shift patterns which do not allow sufficient opportunity to rest, and lack of control over working time arrangements), have all been shown to unfavourably affect individual job outcomes (OECD, 2013; Eurofound, 2017). As noted, there is evidence of some changes to extend weekly contractual working hours across public services (European Commission, 2013, p. 143; Hermann, 2014; Eurofound, 2015, pp. 75–76).

#### *Job (status) security*

Job security, much as the subsequently discussed social job resources, constitutes a characteristic of employment which, if pronounced in a job, represents a job resource, yet which, if absent or low, would need to be classified as a job demand (job insecurity) in being psychologically taxing (Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2013). The public services have traditionally been associated with higher job security (Truss, 2013). This concerns what Gallie *et al.* (2017) have termed ‘job tenure security’, one of two conceptual dimensions to job security relating to the perceived risk of losing one’s job. Considering that the overall UK public sector workforce across public organisations, central and local government under the Coalition Government austerity measures had reduced by around 15% from 2010 to 2015 compared to the pre-GFC years (Bach, 2016), the question whether this has been accompanied with higher perceived job insecurity seems pertinent.

Job security underpins the ability of workers to plan financially in their private lives and meet obligations (Kalleberg, 2016). Job security, or a low (perceived) threat of job loss and inability thereafter to secure similar employment, may be influenced by labour markets, employment regulation and organisational change (Gallie *et al.*, 2017). In the same vein as pay or remuneration, as an extrinsic resource, job security in JD-R literature is conceptualised as resting at the organisational level (Bakker *et al.*, 2003; Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2011), while the absence of job security can also manifest in the experience of associated job demands (Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2013). Considering the influence of, for instance, employment regulation and labour markets as well as what have been unilateral approaches to managing employment relations in public services as evident in imposed recruitment freezes and redundancies as part of austerity measures (Bach and Bordogna, 2013), job security in public service does not fully reside at the level of the organisation. Aside of the influence of trade unions on fostering job security (Findlay *et al.*, 2017), professional control over respective labour markets, such as through licensing and regulation of standards, has been associated with greater job security (Williams & Koumenta, 2020).

Some writers have proposed subjective job (in-)security is best understood when this is further distinguished between two different conceptual types of job insecurity, namely job tenure insecurity and job status insecurity, which both negatively but independently affecting wellbeing (Gallie *et al.*, 2017). Job-related insecurities may not only relate to the threat of job loss (job tenure insecurity), but also to a threat to or potential decline in other important aspects of a job, such as pay, skill, task discretion, and treatment by supervisors or management (job status insecurity) (Gallie *et al.*, 2017).

Notwithstanding the generally positive influence of trade union recognition on alleviating anxieties surrounding job status insecurity in the light of work reorganisation measures or workforce reductions (Gallie *et al.*, 2017), survey findings have suggested that those working in UK public services perceived

their jobs to be more at risk compared to the private sector by 2012 (Gallie *et al.*, 2017) and 47% of public sector respondents in 2011 perceived their jobs to be secure, down from 66% in 2004 (van Wanrooy *et al.*, 2013a). Alongside this, those who had experienced organisational restructuring were more likely to feel that they might be at risk of job loss in the half year following the change (Eurofound, 2012a) even though their jobs had been secure at the time of the restructuring. In the case of those individuals who remained in post after organisational downsizing exercises, these workers were susceptible to worse health outcomes longer term (Eurofound, 2015, pp. 72–3; 96). Considering overall perceptions of job security to have deteriorated, the writers suggest this reflects wider perceptions of declining job quality in public service as a result of rationalisation measures as a response to the fallout of the GFC (Gallie *et al.*, 2017).

### 4.3.3. Social job resources

Social characteristics of work are those involving interaction with others (Humphrey, Nahrgang and Morgeson, 2007) which can have a significant effect on job holder wellbeing (e.g. Semmer and Beehr, 2013). Marketizing public sector reform, as previously detailed in Chapter 2, has seen a redefinition of such interactional components of jobs. This has in some parts of the public services involved a redefinition of service users as ‘customers’ and seen the introduction of management by targets, whereas Chapter 3 highlighted professions as valuing a sense of social cohesion among members of their occupation, such as in the regulation of their practice in peer review and shared understanding of how their services are to be provided, which have implications for the preferred nature of relations with service users, such as this being based on trust.

Crucially, the social environment of jobs has been recognised as both a source for positive and negative experiences of work and wellbeing (Eurofound, 2012c; Semmer and Beehr, 2013). According to JD-R literature, it is an empirical question which (social) job characteristics would be the most salient in any specific job and positively or negatively associated with positive or negative wellbeing outcomes (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007, 2017). In spite of the potentially negative individual outcomes of increasing marketization of and managerialism in public services under neoliberal reform, managerial and service user relations, as well as other interactional elements of professional jobs, such as teamwork and collectivities such as trade unions, yet may offer resources of resilience to negative aspects of the job.

The following subsections thus discuss potential professional social job resources in a public sector reform context in descending order of those social resources located at the extrinsic-level, namely collective interest representation institutions; those social resources located at the level of the work organisation, namely management, teams or co-workers; to those located at the task-level, namely prosocial job resources including service user relations. Generally, extrinsic social resources are widely neglected in work psychology literatures and occupational health and work design models (Godard, 2014; Bal and Dóci, 2018). However, considering their potential to not only constitute social resources in their own right in offering individual workers' both instrumental and emotional support, such as with individual grievances, and collective interest representation institutions, such as trade unions or professional associations, they are arguably far more significant than collective occupation-level group job resources in the potential influence these may have on improving other working conditions, such as negotiating reductions in workloads or better working time arrangements and pay. However, research from within IR/HRM has started to examine collective resources, such as trade unions, within demands-resources frameworks (e.g. Conway *et al.*, 2016; O'Brady and Doellgast, 2021) highlighting the

pertinence of a reconceptualisation of social/collective resources from a worker-centric perspective. As is argued below in the context of public sector employment, collective interest representation institutions still remain important even although such collectivities have been weakened.

### *Collective interest representation: Trade unionism and collective bargaining*

Collective interest representation through trade unions and collective bargaining forms another sphere of social job resources. Where institutional structures allowed for strong trade union presence and membership has been high, this has in the past been associated with a positive impact on job characteristics (Findlay *et al.*, 2017). Generally, extrinsic job resources, such as job security, pay and benefits, hours of work, health and safety and access to training, have fared better as a result of a strong union presence (Clark, 2005; Findlay *et al.*, 2017). Across the EU, unions as well as collective bargaining agreements, where these exist, have a strong influence on pay and working conditions (Fernández-Macías, Muñoz de Bustillo and Antón, 2014, p. 19). However, such a positive influence on job outcomes depends on the ability of unions to influence both local as well as national (or central) level decision making (Gallie, 2007a).

At the collective level, trade unions could thus be seen as an instrument for employee led changes to work design. This group-level form of instrumental support may concern employee-led changes to work design (Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017), for instance, by means of collective industrial action. The collective interest representation mechanisms associated with a job therefore constitute important resources in their ability to create and boost other job resources.

At the individual worker level, trade unions may offer instrumental and emotional support. Social support by trade unions may be what Semmer and Beehr (2013) consider emotional support in providing a group of peers,

including branch officials, with similar experiences able to understand, listen to and sympathise with problems. Instrumental support may concern help with individual grievances or wider protection of individual employment conditions and concrete problems (e.g. Dickens, 2014), such as informing individuals of their rights and helping them enforce workloads that fall within their contractual remit. Collective voice mechanisms have been linked to subjectively more positive attitudes to work, such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Gold and Veersma, 2011, p. 30; Leschke, Watt and Finn, 2012; Gallie, 2013). This, so Davis (2013) argues, could in part be ascribed to the positive impact trade unions can have on working conditions or the perception that their presence makes for a fairer working environment.

Trade union membership and collective bargaining agreements have traditionally been more prominent in the public services (Gold and Veersma, 2011) where collective voice mechanisms were once regarded as an essential factor in the state acting as a 'model employer' (Coffey and Thornley, 2009; Bach and Kessler, 2012a; Marginson, Keune and Bohle, 2014). This higher degree of unionisation of the workforce and union involvement in the public sector still remained higher compared to the private sector after the GFC (Glassner, 2010; European Commission, 2013, p. 11). Across Europe, at around 70%, employee representation was strongest in public administration and defence, followed by education at roughly 63% and the health sector at around 60% (Eurofound, 2012b). Still, trade union membership has been in decline (European Commission, 2013). Some of this decline may be attributed to privatisations and the outsourcing of government functions as well as wider demographic trends (European Commission, 2013, p. 11). Yet, deregulation of employment protections, including rights relating to collective interest representation, has increasingly come under target in the push for further neoliberalisation continuing under austerity (Hermann, 2014; Heyes and Lewis, 2014). An example of workers' collective rights being targeted in the UK are the provisions made under the

Trade Union Act 2016 which have made taking industrial action more challenging.

The decentralisation of collective bargaining has been a policy recommendation by the EU and has become increasingly observed in countries across Europe (Marginson, Keune and Bohle, 2014; ETUI, 2015). Some governments have disregarded or weakened collective bargaining agreements in unilaterally determining pay cuts and freezes following the GFC (Glassner, 2010; Bach and Stroleny, 2013) and union consultation in public sector restructuring was somewhat lacking overall (Eurofound, 2015). Grimshaw, Rubery and Marino (2012, p. 7) consider any move to decentralised bargaining as potentially weakening a “trade union’s ability to set wage norms at national or industry levels.” Centralised collective bargaining, according to Baccaro and Howell (2011), was once considered a key instrument toward increased egalitarianism under capitalism. As far as the UK is concerned, although there had not been a decline in either public sector trade union recognition or membership immediately after the crisis, collective bargaining agreements had decreased (van Wanrooy *et al.*, 2013b). Both the number of agreements in place as well as employees covered by them had significantly declined from 2004 to 2011, specifically, these have dropped from 70% to 57%, respectively, and 68% to 44% (van Wanrooy *et al.*, 2013b).

In particular considering the sense of collegial cohesion shared among members of a profession (e.g. Hall, 1968; Evetts, 2014; Olakivi and Niska, 2017), the institutional arrangements surrounding a job allowing for trade unionism therefore to some extent may provide an important platform which is tapping into the value of a sense of professional cohesion to positively influence individual outcomes. In particular in the light of the increase in unilateral changes to conditions of public sector work and employment that could be witnessed across Europe in response to the GFC (Bach and

Bordogna, 2013), this may have produced negative attitudes to work in those whose trade unions have been side-lined.

### *Management, work teams or co-workers*

Interactions with co-workers or management can be sources of both instrumental and emotional support in work; the former in practical terms, such as in providing information needed for problem solving, the latter in terms of, for instance, offering to talk through challenging situations and by being empathetic (Fuchs, 2007; Semmer and Beehr, 2013). Relations with co-workers can be sources of experiencing work as meaningful and rewarding in providing appreciation, feedback and respect as well as fostering feelings of relatedness (Kahn, 1990; Semmer and Beehr, 2013). Social characteristics of work have been associated with a range of beneficial outcomes, such as reducing intentions to leave (Humphrey, Nahrgang and Morgeson, 2007). However, some research has suggested that social job resources are not necessarily always positively individually experienced. Social support, which is typically assumed to be a job resource, has been suggested to have negative effects on individual wellbeing outcomes where it is unwanted (Deelstra *et al.*, 2003). Nevertheless, wider research on work teams has shown how these can, for instance, help cope with the demands of high risk work (Young *et al.*, 2014).

Relations between professionals and with their work teams could be considered a particularly important social job resource to those in (semi-) professionalised occupations. Recalling arguments presented in Chapter 3, the preferred form of control and evaluation of professional work, setting and enforcing of standards, quality and new work practices by professions is collegially through peer review by those sharing the same expertise (Barber, 1963; Scott, 2008; Evetts, 2013). Professional training and education, as well as serving the acquisition of the required expertise, allows for socialisation into a shared preference for this type of control over professional work,



instilling a sense of cohesion between the members of the occupation, legitimising professional work practices as the accepted appropriate ways to act (Svensson, 2006; Trede, 2012; Evetts, 2014; Carvalho and Santiago, 2016). In doing so, incumbents are provided with a frame of reference through which sets of working conditions come to be seen as 'accepted', 'normal' or legitimate, such as the normalisation of extreme demands (Desmond, 2006, 2011; Turnbull and Wass, 2015; McCann and Granter, 2019). As such, professionalism may shape which working conditions become salient, are viewed as more or less favourable, may present an antidote to other forms of control over work and the collective potential to resist unfavourable (changes in) working conditions, such as through single profession trade unions or professional associations (Reed, 2007; Noordegraaf, 2011, 2016; Dierdorff, 2019).

Managerial relations as social characteristics of work may be evaluated positively or negatively depending, among other factors, on the extent to which management is seen to share the same expertise that is considered the basis of professional authority (e.g. Noordegraaf, 2015). Managerial relations as potential job stressors and sources of conflict considering the typically postulated antagonism between managerialism and professionalism have been explored under Section 4.2.3. The social cohesion among professionals which has shaped preferred working practices, such as peer reviews of work and a sense of shared standards and purpose (identity), provides a contrast to further encroaching managerial forms of control, such as quantitative output targets (e.g. Scott, 2008; McCann and Granter, 2019). This has seen increasing 'hybrid roles' and work practices at (line) management level (Kirkpatrick, 2016).

### *Prosocial characteristics of work and service user interactions*

Beyond the emotional demands of service user relations as sources of strain (Section 4.2.3.), the structure, content and shape of contact with beneficiaries has been proposed as potentially influencing attitudes and behaviours of workers (Grant, 2007, 2008). This association may be positive where beneficiary interactions in work would foster employees' construction of "identities as competent, self-determined, socially valued individuals" (Kahn, 1990; Bakker *et al.*, 2007; Grant, 2007, p. 405; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2017). As Corin (2016, p. 34) argues, especially in service work, clients can also be "possible resource[s] for receiving recognition, appreciation, and gratitude".

Experiencing a job as useful to society and helpful to others have also been acknowledged as universally valued aspects of work in wider social science literatures (Esser and Lindh, 2018; Gallie, 2019). Being able to help others and experiencing this as rewarding has been proposed to positively relate to subjective wellbeing, in particular to those who are strongly pro-socially motivated (Grant, 2007; Fisher, 2014). Yet, this "relational architecture of jobs refer[ring] to the structural properties of work that shape employees' opportunities to connect and interact with other people" beyond their immediate place of work forms an integral, if yet sometimes somewhat neglected, characteristic of work (Grant, 2007, p. 396; Humphrey, Nahrgang and Morgeson, 2007). Aspects of work shaping the nature of contact with beneficiaries and those conveying the impact one's work may have on beneficiaries provide domains of characteristics of work relevant to realising (and fostering) prosocial motives (Grant, 2007, 2008; Grant and Berg, 2012). The relational aspects of work in terms of contact with and impact on beneficiaries connect to prosocial professional values, namely what Schwartz (1994) identified as 'benevolence' and 'universalism' values. As prosocial motives concern a desire to impart a positive effect on some other social entity, the notion 'beneficiaries' in this regard is not restricted to service users

alone, but may also relate to colleagues or more abstract ideas of the 'wider public' (Grant and Berg, 2012).

Two relational characteristics of jobs are pertinent to prosocial motives (Grant, 2007, 2008). On the one hand, these concern those aspects of work shaping the nature of contact with beneficiaries in terms of the frequency, duration, physical proximity, depth, and breadth of this. On the other, the impact one's work may have on beneficiaries in terms of its magnitude, scope, frequency and prevention focus provides a domain of characteristics of work relevant to prosocial motives (Grant, 2007, 2008; Grant and Berg, 2012). The latter has also been referred to as "task significance" (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). The concern with prosocial work values is not whether these are sincere and necessarily acted upon, but rather how professional prosocial values are understood in relation to changes in job characteristics (e.g. Campbell and Marshall, 2005, p. 204). That is, how individuals view themselves in relation to their work and changes therein as well as in its environment.

Neoliberal reforms which have redefined what constitutes 'the public interest' according to output targets as a marker of quality in public service or according to public expenditure savings and efficiency as evidenced in terms of 'value for money' have challenged the prior custodial arrangements of public service delivery based on professional understandings of the public interest (Ackroyd, 1995; Hoggett, 1996; Diefenbach, 2009; Prebble, 2016). It is because of the importance of the special public interest a profession serves that is the basis of professional pride and prestige (Leicht, 2016b) which is increasingly brought into question through such reforms and may potentially be undermining a profession's sense of being socially valued or important (Ackroyd, 2016; Evetts, 2018; McCann and Granter, 2019; Molina and O'Shea, 2020).

At the more immediate work level, commodified public sector professional work catering to the demands of ‘customers’ or service users under individualised funding arrangements may conflict with professional ideas on what ‘helping people’ means. Professional ideas of how to dispense help are shaped by shared ethics encapsulated in codes of conduct and underpin discretionary decision making at the frontline (Jensen, 2018; Schott, van Kleef and Steen, 2018). This professional understanding of ‘helping’ could be seen as underpinned by specialist knowledge and expertise and by what is understood as a profession’s purpose or sense of identity (e.g. Semmer and Beehr, 2013). Challenges to such a professional understanding to decide on what would most benefit individual service users or was in the public interest might thus be experienced negatively.

#### 4.3.4. Intrinsic job resources

Intrinsic resources concern those related to the work activity itself, such as autonomy or how many different skills and how much so these are being utilised (Bakker *et al.*, 2003; Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2011). The opportunity to develop or expand new skills as part of learning and training provided in the job, whether on-the-job or in a course, further constitute intrinsic job resources in their own right as well as in promoting job resources, e.g. autonomy (OECD, 2013; Eurofound, 2017, pp. 36, 79–84).

Job control is at the core of various concepts, such as autonomy, direct participation, discretion or job decision latitude (Karasek, 1979; Gallie, 2013). Across literatures, this relates to deciding the tasks, order and methods needed to complete or comprising a job, scheduling the work and its speed as well as deciding standards and assessing the final quality of the work making it critical to self-development (Gallie and Zhou, 2013; Kalleberg, 2016). Autonomy is perhaps the most thoroughly studied job resource for the

positive effects it may have on individual outcomes, including whether this can offset some demanding aspects of work (Peccei, 2012; Guest, 2014). Autonomy has been positively linked to psychological wellbeing and experiencing work as meaningful and interesting (Boxall and Macky, 2014; Kalleberg, 2016). Nevertheless, individuals differ in their preferred amount of autonomy such that large amounts of autonomy may be associated with significant responsibility which may be experienced as overwhelming, burdensome and stressful (Webster, Beehr and Love, 2011; Semmer and Beehr, 2013).

Employment relations literature considers autonomy a direct form of employee participation associated with positive individual job outcomes (Gallie, 2013, p. 453). This is mirrored in work design literatures in which autonomy underpins individuals' ability to 'craft' their jobs in having the freedom to decide and alter the content of a job (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). In the sociology of the professions, job control has also been studied and thought of as being instrumental in groups of occupations exploiting this to their advantage to deliver services suited mostly to self-interest than the wider public interest (e.g. Saks, 2010, 2016a). This has underpinned much neoliberal public sector reform as well as conflict theorisations of the professions (Cousins, 1987; Lethbridge, 2011; Ackroyd, 2016). Neoliberal reform approaches have sought to limit the autonomy enjoyed by public servants and public service professions more specifically (e.g. Scott, 2008). Although professional autonomy as connected to monopolisation of a field of knowledge was to some extent facilitated legislatively by the state, increasingly this became seen as a source for professions to enhance their own rewards, drain public expenditure while remaining irresponsive to change and citizen wants (Ackroyd, 2013; Newman, 2013; Tonkens, 2016; Bach, 2019). Autonomy as a core professional value therefore does not resonate well with marketizing, managerialist control central to neoliberal reforms (e.g. McCann and Granter, 2019).

Professional autonomy must be understood in the context of collegial work practices, such as peer reviews. The shared occupational expertise, knowledge or technical skills over a distinct field gained during specialised training or education (Campbell and Marshall, 2005; Noordegraaf, 2015) was (aside of obtaining the license to practice) what qualified members of a profession used to judge the quality, not just of their own work, but also that of other professionals as well as determine the best suited processes and methods of working. It is this knowledge or expertise which translates into competence through training, education and/or on the job experience (socialisation) that is seen as the basis for judging the quality of work, the methods to be employed and discretion in the judgement of complex individual cases (e.g. Evetts, 2009, 2011). Therefore, opportunities for learning and training, in particular amongst peers, may gain triple significance in the context of public service professional work; that is in being resources in their own right in fostering (feelings of) competence, in underpinning other professional job resources (e.g. autonomy) (OECD, 2013; Eurofound, 2017, pp. 36, 79–84; Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017), and in fostering and maintaining a sense of professional cohesion (e.g. Hall, 1968; Evetts, 2014; Olakivi and Niska, 2017).

Considering the need to uphold certain standards so to maintain service users' trust in the quality of their work, including to be using professional knowledge in their or the wider public's interest (Evetts, 2006, 2014; Pfadenhauer, 2006; Tonkens, 2016), professional autonomy at the job level then never was fully absolute (Noordegraaf, 2007, 2015, 2016). Rather, considering the control by peers over access to the profession and what standards had to be met following training/education, as well as continuously in daily professional practice subject to codes of conduct or direct peer evaluations (Larson, 1977, p. 58; Muzio, Kirkpatrick and Kipping, 2011; Ponnert and Svensson, 2016), professional autonomy resides at the level of the occupation rather than purely the individual job level. Based on shared understandings of autonomy, this further highlights that it is not solely

professional autonomy itself at the level of the profession that is valued but also the element of social cohesion from within which this autonomy is maintained (Evetts, 2011).

This has implications in the light of neoliberal reform. Where such systems of work are opened up to external scrutiny from outside the profession, rather than purely being an erosion of discretion at the individual level, it is the judgement by those deemed unqualified or too far detached to understand the methods, purposes and daily realities of professional work which conflict with professional values and elicit negative attitudes to such changes (e.g. McCann and Granter, 2019). Thus the issue resides with how and by whom control over professional work is exerted (Noordegraaf, 2007, 2016) rather than with control limiting professional autonomy in itself. Professionalism as a normative type of control, namely from within the profession through peer evaluations and codes of ethics/practice, has been juxtaposed to the technical-bureaucratic types of control employed by organisations/managers (Thompson, 2003; Evetts, 2013; Noordegraaf, 2015). This may aggravate the negative effects of the qualitative demands posed by changes in the nature of control over professional work, such as where quantitative output targets are utilised to evaluate the performance of professionals at work.

Yet, it has been argued that in spite of consecutive waves of neoliberal reform introducing market-based and managerial control as well as professional regulation itself, public service professions continue to exert some degree of discretion or at least (informally) resist certain controls (e.g. Gale, 2012; Thunman, 2016). Pressures from 'customer satisfaction' surveys, service user demands more generally or views of the wider public may further present an increasing challenge to professional conduct.

## 4.4. Individual job outcomes: Experiences of the professional values and JD-R dynamic

The JD-R model was developed and is utilised to explain wellbeing at work (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001), rather than job quality per se. In this vein, this section discusses how the effects of job demands and resources may be experienced individually to shape various potential individual job outcomes in the light of macro-level contextual change (public sector reform and austerity) and meso-level professional influences (professional values). The section begins by outlining the dominant approach of conceptualising positive individual job outcomes embedded in JD-R model literatures alongside critical reflection which informs a worker-centric, non-unitarist adaptation of the model. Wider concepts for evaluating positive and negative individual health and wellbeing at work are presented against influences from the macro- and meso-level discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

### 4.4.1. Conceptualising positive and negative individual job outcomes

#### *Positive individual health and wellbeing job outcomes*

Although the JD-R model can be used to understand a variety of individual wellbeing outcomes, a large number of studies has examined the two main indicators for wellbeing at work associated with the model since its inception; namely burnout and work engagement (Lesener, Gusy and Wolter, 2019). This reflects the wider dominant synonymous treatment of work engagement and motivation with individual wellbeing across JD-R model-based literatures (cf Halbesleben, 2011; Nahrgang, Morgeson and Hofmann, 2011; Lesener,



Gusy and Wolter, 2019)(cf Halbesleben, 2011; Nahrgang, Morgeson and Hofmann, 2011; Lesener, Gusy and Wolter, 2019)(cf Halbesleben, 2011; Nahrgang, Morgeson and Hofmann, 2011; Lesener, Gusy and Wolter, 2019)(cf Halbesleben, 2011; Nahrgang, Morgeson and Hofmann, 2011; Lesener, Gusy and Wolter, 2019)(cf Halbesleben, 2011; Nahrgang, Morgeson and Hofmann, 2011; Lesener, Gusy and Wolter, 2019)(cf Halbesleben, 2011; Nahrgang, Morgeson and Hofmann, 2011; Lesener, Gusy and Wolter, 2019)(cf Halbesleben, 2011; Nahrgang, Morgeson and Hofmann, 2011; Lesener, Gusy and Wolter, 2019). In doing so, the managerialist bias inherent in current JD-R theory becomes apparent in two ways. First, this is evident in the conflation of motivation (as a process distinctly of employer interest) with job resources' positive effects on individual wellbeing. Second, work engagement conceptually in essence concerns the state of being motivated (Bakker, 2011). The construct of work engagement as the "combination of the capability [...] and willingness to work" (Bakker, Albrecht and Leiter, 2011b, p. 75) in itself thus offers a narrow conceptualisation of positive wellbeing at work from a worker-centric perspective. Reducing "true wellbeing" at work (Hakanen and Roodt, 2010, p. 89) to being positively engrossed in one's work as is encapsulated in the notion 'work engagement' ultimately defines worker wellbeing in terms of what is most beneficial for employer interests. Rather, interest in work engagement might reflect the general trend away from "coercive controls towards the consensual and indirect" associated with 'work humanisation initiatives' over the last few decades (Thompson, 2003, p. 147).

While research has suggested that work engagement can be beneficial for employees, critical commentators see the issue with engagement in its appeal to and use by managers as a means of "motivating without money" (Maslach, 2011, p. 51). Engaged employees may not reap a share of the bottom line gains they produce (George, 2011) leaving to some degree open the extent of mutuality for workers in terms of actual 'gains' beyond the mere

(fluctuating, fleeting) experience of this positive psychological state (Guest, 2014; Keenoy, 2014; Purcell, 2014). Ultimately, work engagement as an individual level conceptual framing for wellbeing deeply rooted in a 'win-win/mutual gains' perspective is unsuited to research concerned with overcoming the unitarist, managerialist conceptual bias embedded in JD-R theory.

Positive individual job outcomes of the effects of job characteristics have often been assessed in attitudinal or affective terms. Job satisfaction as an attitudinal measure of positive affect toward the job (or satisfaction with its characteristics) enjoys a rich research tradition across social sciences. According to Guest (2008) four theories explaining how job satisfaction is thought to occur are particularly noteworthy. These relate to a match between an individual and the working environment (person-environment fit), the satisfaction of needs, or expectations, and a perceived balance between effort and reward (Vroom, 1964; Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Siegrist, 1996; Gagné and Deci, 2005). Although job satisfaction has been found useful in explaining turnover intentions, its usefulness as an indicator for individual work-related wellbeing or overall measure of job quality has been questioned (Green, 2006, p. 11). A main concern resides in how job satisfaction resonates with and is shaped by (social) factors within and beyond the workplace, such as class (Hebson, Rubery and Grimshaw, 2015), past experience, norms and expectations and is susceptible to the effects of socialisation or other social cues, such as comparisons (Guest, 2008; Kalleberg, 2016). Qualitative research more suited to holistic exploration of phenomena within their social context, for example, has shed light on such social mechanisms and given more nuanced accounts of high reported levels of job satisfaction (Brown, Charlwood and Spencer, 2012; Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014).

In spite of the above limitations, a key benefit of using attitudinal constructs to evaluate positive job outcomes is that these take into account the extent to

which “people are experts on their own jobs” (Piasna *et al.*, 2017, p. 173). Such subjective assessments of the quality of a job, according to Gallie (2007a, p. 7), allow “people to judge for themselves what is important about a job”. Rather than evaluating job satisfaction as a universal measure of the ‘goodness’ of a job, context-sensitive research may thus explore the aspects of jobs, conditions under and mechanisms through which this may be experienced as part of efforts seeking to gain a holistic understanding of how professional public service jobs are experienced in a reform context. Whereas job satisfaction requires some cognitive evaluation of the components of or of a job as a whole, as opposed to distress, positive affect toward work, such as feeling enthusiastic, can also be conceptualised as morale at both the individual and group-level (Cotton and Hart, 2003; Dollard, Osborne and Manning, 2012).

### *Negative individual health and wellbeing job outcomes*

Negative individual outcomes of the interdynamic effects of job characteristics include ill-health indicators, such as high sickness absence levels, high levels of presenteeism, that is attending at work when sick or unwell, high levels of stress, turnover or expressions of the intention to leave (Humphrey, Nahrgang and Morgeson, 2007; Guest, 2008, 2017; Eurofound, 2012a). Where opportunities for exit are perceived to be small but there is a desire to leave, this may result in individuals feeling ‘trapped’ in their jobs (Knox *et al.*, 2015).

As Section 4.2.1. noted, job demands and a context of few coping resources can lead to negative wellbeing outcomes. Turnover and absenteeism are considered behavioural outcomes of excessive job stress (Tausig and Fenwick, 2011, p. 41). These may follow or be characterised by burnout as the ill-health outcome of prolonged exposure to high stress levels which is characterised by cynicism, exhaustion and inefficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001). Cynicism regarding the work content, object or work in general

in order to de-identify and distance oneself from these highlights a disengagement from work (Demerouti *et al.*, 2000, 2001). In critical work organisation literatures, cynicism and humour have been discussed as examples of (micro-)acts of resistance and subversion to managerial prerogative where power relations offer otherwise little scope for other means to resist this, such as drawing on collective instruments through trade union involvement (Fleming and Spicer, 2003; Taylor and Bain, 2003).

#### 4.4.2. Positive or negative individual job outcomes: Experiences of the professional values and JD-R dynamic

It is through characteristics of work and employment that professional values come to shape individual outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Dierdorff and Morgeson, 2013). While public sector reform may not necessarily produce a value conflict between the neoliberal paradigm and professional values as areas of potential agreement exist (e.g. Ponnert and Svensson, 2016), where value conflict occurs nonetheless this can be associated with lower job satisfaction (Shafer, Park and Liao, 2002). Generally the latest reforms may have challenged the bases out of which public service professions could gain satisfaction with their jobs' characteristics or overall. Irrespective of whether public service professionals are viewed as concerned with sheltering their social and economic rewards from work or as dedicated to a 'higher cause', as discussed in Chapter 3, changes in job demands and resources in a reform context may have altered in such ways to have had implications for individual wellbeing.

Recalling earlier arguments, a perceived balance between effort and reward is a central tenet of the JD-R model and underpins experiences of job satisfaction (Siegrist, 1996; Guest, 2008). Changes in job demands (Sections 4.2.2. and 4.2.3.) for those working in public services affected by austerity alongside simultaneous cuts to job rewards, such as pay cuts and freezes

(Section 4.3.2.) may have shifted any perceived effort-reward balance and job satisfaction. Further imbalance and negative affect may occur where workload increases are situated in task domains potentially less associated with the core purpose of a profession or those tasks which are concerned with facilitating control from external to the profession (Hupe and van der Kogt, 2013). Additionally, reductions in rewards may be seen as challenging a profession's understanding of its status, worth to society and deserved rewards (e.g. Larson, 1977, pp. x, 67; Exworthy, Hyde and McDonald-Kuhne, 2016; Leicht, 2016b, p. 189).

The intrinsic satisfaction that professionals are able to gain from their work may be subject to decline as a result of austerity and associated public sector reform. Resource scarcity or additional red tape might impede professionals' ability to carry out their tasks overall as well as to their preferred standard (e.g. Giauque *et al.*, 2012; Giauque, Anderfuhren-Biget and Varone, 2013; Noesgaard and Hansen, 2017). Additionally, questioning professionals' service ethic and work motivation (Lethbridge, 2011), including through control from outwith the profession, such as through output targets and evaluations of 'value for money' in public sector professional work (Chapter 2), may conflict with a professional "belief in [their work's] value both in and of itself and for serving the needs of others" (Freidson, 2001, p. 108). Grateful clients and a grateful wider public are psychologically rewarding, meaningful characteristics of professional work (Newman, 2013, p. 41). While neoliberal public sector reforms may have changed service user interactions or perceptions of the wider public of professionals through increasing marketization (see Chapter 2), work in public service by its very nature may yet continue to satisfy prosocial motives where, for instance, a sense of task significance has been maintained (e.g. van Loon *et al.*, 2016).

Professionals tend to strongly identify with the values of their occupation (Parding, Abrahamsson and Berg-Jansson, 2012). Managerial neoliberal reforms where these present clashing values, are seen as 'alien intrusions',

and depending on the degree of 'hybridity' in frontline professional roles which could provide shelter from such reforms (Noordegraaf and De Wit, 2012; Noordegraaf, 2015; Olakivi and Niska, 2017; Wright, Irving and Selvan Thevatas, 2020), this might have implications for the individual. Individuals might seek to distance, disassociate and de-identify themselves from neoliberal reform driven changes to the content, practices or purpose of their work where these conflict with their professional identity and therefore values. A lack of identification with one's job and attempts to distance and disassociate oneself from managerial control may be expressed through cynicism (Demerouti *et al.*, 2000, 2001; Fleming and Spicer, 2003; Tong *et al.*, 2020).

## 4.5. Research questions and conceptual framework

This chapter has advanced a multilevel framework for understanding the effects of public sector reform and austerity measures on two categories of working conditions (job demands and resources), their dynamic and the implications this has for individual outcomes within the context of professional values. This has sought to address a scarcity in studies examining both macro- and occupation-level influences on job conditions, their inter-dynamic and influence to shape individual outcomes (Morgeson, Dierdorff and Hmurovic, 2010; Tausig and Fenwick, 2011; Dierdorff and Morgeson, 2013; Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017; Dierdorff, 2019; Rattrie, Kittler and Paul, 2020; van Veldhoven *et al.*, 2020; Williams and Koumenta, 2020). The framework therefore comprises the macro level of public sector reform within which occupations are embedded; spans across the job level to reflect working conditions within their unique organisational context; and ultimately connects these to individual experiences. It is at the level of working conditions (job demands and resources) that macro-level reform takes shape

with potential subsequent relevance to individual outcomes (Harney, Fu and Freaney, 2018). The job level is further relevant considering professional values both in terms of linking these to individual outcomes as well as in their capacity to interact with perceptions of changes to job conditions driven by macro-level influences. Different constellations of working conditions and macro-level influences on changes therein with potential spill over effects, which are further subject to evaluations informed by professional values, come together at the job level to shape individual outcomes.

Macro-level influences in terms of government responses to the GFC to employ a mixture of structural reforms and/or quantitative adjustments have varied across different parts of the public sector, as detailed in Chapter 2, and thus produced various changes in working conditions. This is explored through Research Question 1 (RQ1) which asks how characteristics of work and employment have changed across occupational contexts as a result of public sector reforms under austerity.

Characteristics of jobs closely aligned with professional values may have been altered directly or indirectly subject to macro-level influences, namely structural reform and quantitative adjustment. In considering the influence of public service professionalism, this chapter has identified potential combinations of influences and changes in professional job demands and resources under neoliberal public sector reform. Changes in one job characteristic as a result of macro-level influences may in itself be associated with more unfavourable effects on individual outcomes, while creating a spill over effect on other job conditions which further may resonate particularly strongly with professional values. Values provide evaluative standards pertaining to desirable end states or goals (Schwartz, 1994, 2012; Hitlin and Piliavin, 2004) and therefore provide a lens through which the meaning of changes in working conditions to public service professionals can be understood. This has implications both in terms of which job conditions come to be salient and experienced as negative or positive as well as in amplifying

or reducing the negative or positive effects of job demands and resources on individual outcomes. Research Question 2 (RQ2) therefore asks about the extent to which, and how, public sector reforms have shaped job demands and resources in the context of professional values.

Moreover, as well as professional values amplifying or reducing the effects of job demands and resources on individual outcomes, the effects of changes to professional job demands and resources in the light of austerity and public sector reform may see an erosion of the meaning professionals were able to derive from their work as would be expected to be evident in negative attitudes to work and, for instance, sickness absence or presenteeism. Research Question 3 (RQ3) thus asks how individuals have experienced public sector reforms in terms of the two categories of working conditions and professional values. The extent to which differences between the dynamics of macro-level reform measures, institutional level influences (professional values), the two categories of working conditions and individual outcomes can be noted across contexts is explored under Research Question (RQ4).



Thus, the four research questions have been formulated as follows.

*RQ1:*

How do the effects of neoliberal public sector reforms on characteristics of public sector work and employment differ across occupational contexts?

*RQ2:*

To what extent, and how, have public sector reforms shaped job demands and job resources in the context of professional values?

*RQ3:*

How have individuals in professions experienced public sector reforms in terms of job demands, job resources and professional values?

*RQ4:*

What role is played by occupational context?

Figure 4.1 illustrates the different levels (macro- to individual-level) at which the core concepts and research questions are located. The figure depicts public sector reform measures at the macro-level. Ultimately, macro-level reforms are more or less directly connected to the job-level, where constellations of job demands and resources are situated and which, in turn, gain salience, are experienced either positively or negatively and whose effects on outcomes at the individual-level are potentially shaped (i.e., amplified or reduced), through professional values. Experiences of working conditions as potentially mediated through the lens of professional values help explain when, why and how a characteristic of a job comes to be experienced as significant, important or notable (i.e., gains salience). Notably, these values are embedded in professional identities at the meso-level of the occupation. The dotted line surrounding these phenomena is intended to reflect the overarching focus and comparative nature of RQ4.

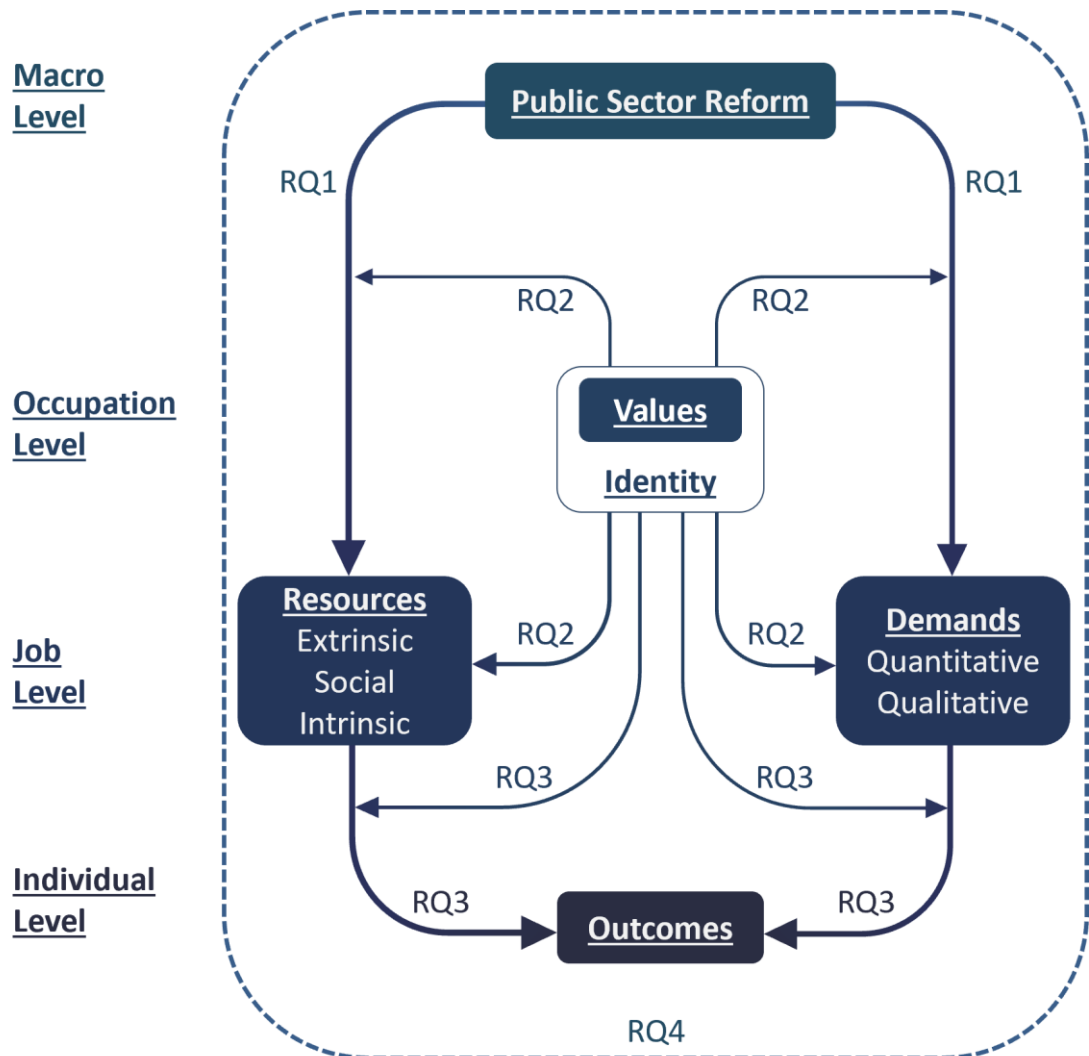


Figure 4.1: The analytical framework and research questions (RQs)

It should be noted that Figure 4.2 is not intended to portray deterministic assumptions surrounding causality, but rather suggests potential for influence and change in a cascading manner across a structural hierarchy. Chapters 3 and 4 argued for an alternative to explaining variation in experiences of job characteristics as purely intra-individual, psychological phenomena, and instead, that such experiences need to be understood from situating job characteristics within the social structural context in which they occur. Job characteristics are represented as a potential nexus between (social) structure and individual job outcomes. Neither does the figure claim to offer a

complete representation of all potential relations between core concepts. For example, the figure does not represent dynamics between job demands and resources that are likely to emerge from reform-driven changes to one job characteristic; e.g. greater qualitative job demands may connect to increased reporting and performance monitoring and potential reductions in autonomy as an intrinsic job resource. The operationalisation of the research questions and conceptual framework are discussed in more depth in Chapter 5.

## 4.6. Chapter conclusions

This chapter proposed adaptations to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) analytical framework drawing on broader IR, sociology (of work) and organisation literatures to supplement work psychology and organisational behaviour (OB) debates in which the JD-R model is rooted. The conceptual framework proposed in this chapter has detailed (1) the relations between macro-level influences in terms of public sector reform and austerity, (2) meso-level institutional influences in terms of professional identities and associated values, (3) how these combine at the job-level in terms of experiences of job demands and resources, and (4) what implications this combination at the job-level has for individual job outcomes. The adaptation of the model has synthesised discussion of the characteristics of and trends in neoliberal public sector reform measures presented in Chapter 2, how the two core categories of working conditions underpinning the model are conceptualised in JD-R literatures and supplemented this with concepts from the disciplines contributing to the wider field of employment relations. This involved the framing of working conditions as evaluated through the lens of a set of occupationally shared values. Based on this discussion, four research questions were formulated to guide the structure and content of the remainder of the thesis. The subsequent chapter details how these considerations have been taken forward in the empirical study and presents the research methodology and design as informed by the core research assumptions.

## *Chapter 5. Methodology*

This chapter details the empirical study designed to address the research questions presented in Chapter 4 related to the dynamic between macro-level reforms, working conditions, professional values and individual outcomes. The chapter begins by presenting the rationale for a critical realist epistemological approach and the qualitative case study research design. The chapter goes on to detail the choice of the two case studies (Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) and Further Education (FE) colleges in Scotland), and provides overviews of the particulars of the data set for each case study, including access to research participants, sampling choices, data collection methods and reflections on the fieldwork processes. Following this, the chapter details the analytical approach with regard to the case study data. Following Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014), a coding framework was devised and several coding techniques were utilised to aid analysis and draw out themes from the data. The chapter concludes by addressing potential limitations of the chosen research design, including the desirability of a potential third comparative case study, and presents matters of reflexivity with respect to the study implementation.

### **5.1. A critical realist approach**

Critical realist epistemology contrasts with positivism, which is the dominant paradigm in work psychology (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000; Fleetwood and Ackroyd, 2004; Bal and Dóci, 2018). Positivist enquiry, as with the natural sciences, assumes that social scientific phenomena can be studied objectively 'as they are'; namely, the "methodologically engineered" notion that the knower can be separated from knowledge (Duberley and Johnson, 2009, p. 345). While research observations may inevitably mostly be limited to the 'empirical' realm of social reality (Easton, 2000), the positivistic assumption of consensus in the empirical domain, such as between self-

reported and observer rated working conditions, as representative of objective reality is inadequate for capturing the 'deeper' social mechanisms and structures which shape 'empirical' manifestations, such as perceptions and experiences of social phenomena (cf Hobfoll, 1989; Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Donaldson, 2005; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

For critical realists, events or outcomes are multiply-determined and driven by mechanisms which are not directly observable (Kessler and Bach, 2014). The 'context-mechanism-outcome' (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) view surrounding the manifestation of social phenomena, according to Ackroyd and Karlsson (2014, pp. 39–40), necessitates "a move from asking whether an intervention works to asking what makes it work." Research thus needs to carefully attempt to identify the "chains of connected events in which the capacities of objects are activated sequentially" (Ackroyd, 2004, p. 143). Such events may often present as tendencies or demi-regularities (Kessler and Bach, 2014).

Applying a critical realist lens to understanding experiences of job characteristics necessitates situating these characteristics within the context in which they emerged (Porter, 2000; Hebson, Rubery and Grimshaw, 2015). This requires evaluation of the social structures which influenced and preceded their construction. A profession as an institution, for example, constitutes such a social structure in that it denotes the relations between those belonging to a professionalised occupation compared to other members of society who do not. While a 'profession' is the product of social construction, it is no longer reducible to merely being just a social construction and exists independent of conceptions held of it, while continuously being reproduced and/or potentially changed to some degree by social agents (Porter, 2000). A profession as an institution (or professionalisation as the process towards obtaining the occupational status of full profession) thus may shape (some) job characteristics through occupational regulation and control of work, whilst related 'professionalism'

provides social agents with a 'concept' comprising occupational values and a set of formal and informal rules through which to interpret (and evaluate), maintain or change the job characteristics associated with an occupation. This reflects the critical realist view of social structure or objects as concept-mediated (Fleetwood, 2004; Hurrell, 2014).

The previous example also illustrates the structure-agency connection underpinning the maintenance of or changes in social reality (morphostasis and morphogenesis) (Archer, 2007) which critical realist studies seek to be cognisant of. Explanation thus seeks to establish a plausible account of the properties of phenomena in relation to those of others and why these happened as they did, guided through the conceptual framing provided by theory (Ackroyd, 2004). As such, explanation is always historical rather than predictive and purely focused on event regularities. Although this can be useful to point to the operation of a mechanism in the first place, these are not seen as adequately representing underlying mechanisms between events which would allow for universal laws to be formulated (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014). Current questions within JD-R literatures which may benefit from alternative methodological approaches surround irregularities in experiences of working conditions which are contrary to expectation, how context interacts with these (such as the influence of moderator variables on the relations described in the model), and questions within wider job quality or industrial relations debates over the influence of context on experiences of working conditions and how these can best be understood. One example of such a phenomenon is when 'objectively bad jobs' are experienced as 'subjectively good' (e.g. Adamson and Roper, 2019).

While research accounts cannot be written independently of their observer in a neutral language, that is not to say that these can never amount to describing more than a subjective construction residing purely within the mind of the research participants (researcher and researchees) (Martin and Thompson, 1997; Porter, 2000; Thompson, 2004). As Ackroyd and

Fleetwood (2000, p. 11) emphasise “realists do want to hold that better and worse forms of knowledge do exist and that there are reliable procedures for producing better knowledge of things and events.” This further necessitates, according to Thompson (2004, p. 58), “transparent, shared ways of discussing and resolving” limitations in the extent to which ‘reality claims’ accurately to reflect ‘what is’. It is thus necessary to reflect on what factors during the research process and emanating from the research design may have influenced the explanations advanced in a study (Maxwell, 2017). Section 5.7. of the present chapter discusses such limitations and matters of reflexivity in relation to this study.

The following section details how these epistemological assumptions have informed the research design and evaluation of suitable research methods. A case study design and qualitative data collection methods were chosen to explore relevant social mechanisms between experiences of characteristics of work and employment as situated in a wider institutional context.

## 5.2. Research methods

As the rationale behind the present research is to gain a better understanding of the dynamic of reform, job conditions and professional values, a case study design was chosen. This affords the possibility to explore phenomena in situ of relevant contextual peculiarities and influences (Kessler and Bach, 2014; Maxwell, 2017). Based on the previous arguments that public sector reform measures, job conditions and interpretations of professional values differ across sectors and occupations, this underlines the requirement for a context sensitive research approach. Furthermore, qualitative methods allow an exploration of how phenomena are experienced by individuals (Maxwell, 2009). In the present study, the focus was on the experiences of job conditions within the context of public sector reform and professional values.

Considering that critical realist explanation seeks to understand the mechanisms underpinning social phenomena rejecting a successionist view of causality (Brown *et al.*, 2021), qualitative methods are suited to exploring and identifying these mechanisms. The case study design and qualitative data collection methods are discussed further in the following two subsections.

### 5.2.1. Case study design

Case selection representing different contexts allows an understanding of the commonalities, differences and similarities of how phenomena work in other relevant contexts (Mason, 2002, p. 125; Maxwell, 2009). This connects to previous arguments that public sector reform approaches in the light of austerity do not uniformly entail the same composition of measures and policies (Chapter 2). Similarly, professional values as evaluative lenses to changes are not uniformly interpreted (Chapter 3). This warrants adoption of a context sensitive methodological approach as offered by case study designs.

Case studies offer the opportunity to “tease out and disentangle a complex set of factors and relationships, albeit in one or a small number of instances” (Easton, 2010, p. 119). As was previously noted, job demands and resources are unique to their job-specific context. By adopting a multi-case study approach, it was hoped to identify differences in factors, relationships and the interplay the socio-political environment might have on various job characteristics and thus capture such “complex social phenomena” (Yin, 2014, p. 4). Using multiple cases, therefore, provides the advantage of observing these differences to gather wider perspectives and therefore a fuller picture of the dynamic of macro- and meso-level influences, such as



public sector reform and occupation-level institutions, with working conditions.

Moreover, reform trajectories are dynamic, continuing from previous reforms and with change taking place incrementally (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017, pp. 215–216). Case study methods allow sensitivity to such contextually dependent variables. As was previously highlighted, attempting to unpick the effects of one wave of public sector reform from that of another may never be fully accomplished (Tailby, 2012; Vaughan-Whitehead, 2013) and may be of limited merit when individuals' lived experiences of such reforms are shaped by their aggregate effects. That is not to say that it would be impossible to observe instances of what appear more direct effects of one wave of reform than another, such as where this would be distinct from, rather than building upon, previous policies or practices and introducing something truly novel. This research, however, does not aim to decipher solely the influence of austerity-era driven reforms on experiences of jobs. Rather, these reforms were taken as an illustrative example for highlighting the need to account for macro-level context and meso-level institutions currently lacking in work design and occupational health models such as the JD-R model. Case study design offers the ability to analytically take these contextual dynamics into consideration.

Given the study's focus on professional values, another advantage of adopting case study methods rests on the observations of how these values operate and interact with both different sets of job conditions as well as reform driven-changes therein afforded by a case comparison. As has been highlighted, job demands and job resources depend upon the individual valuing these negatively or positively and appraising them as either demands or resources (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014). It is therefore important to consider individuals as situated in their social context in order to be able to grasp what might cause changes in an individual's appraisal (e.g. Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978; Manicas, 2006, p. 3; Dierdorff, 2019). For instance, institutional logics

associated with certain public sector organisations or parts of the public sector may be either 'people processing' or 'people changing' and these may have implications for the potential effects of prosocial work values on individual outcomes (Vandenabeele, Brewer and Ritz, 2014; Borst, 2018).

Whilst a case study approach does not allow generalizing to a population, multiple cases allow comparisons which can aid in analytically generalizing to theory (Gibbert and Ruigrok, 2010), such as theorising the role of professional values to better understand their dynamic with job conditions and public sector reform as well as the implications of this for individual outcomes.

## 5.2.2. Qualitative methods

Critical realism as a form of inquiry is committed to studying 'what is', while maintaining that knowledge can never be a full objective mirror of 'what is'; consequently, it holds no preference for a particular research methodology (Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014; Williams, 2014, p. 283; Vincent and O'Mahoney, 2017). Rather, this depends on the outcome of research envisaged, such as identifying mechanisms operating in a context (intensive research design) or comparing how a mechanism works across several contexts (extensive research design), the nature of the phenomenon under study and what is deemed as offering the best tools for attempting to better understand 'what is' (Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014; Vincent and O'Mahoney, 2017). Differences in adopted methodologies garner different research findings (Brown, Charlwood and Spencer, 2012) as these offer distinctive tools for exploring different aspects and levels of depth of the subject matter (Daniels, 2006).

In line with arguments presented in Chapter 3 concerning the tendencies of ‘methodological individualism’ to reduce explanations of social phenomena to individual beliefs or behaviour (Mingers, 2006), the research shares the critical realist view that “social structures and the meanings actors attribute to their situation have to be recognised in the way we construct explanations” (Thompson and McHugh, 2009, p. 391). Explanations of social phenomena referencing individual beliefs and behaviour only make sense when considered in their social and institutional context (Mingers, 2006). As the research seeks to develop and supplement the current understanding of the dynamics between macro- and meso- institutional context with the JD-R model’s categories of working conditions in the light of their individual outcomes, a qualitative methodology is appropriate. Although studies focused on the JD-R model tend to be largely quantitative, the utility of qualitative methods in an initial exploratory phase to identify relevant job demands and resources has been recognised (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; de Jonge, Demerouti and Dormann, 2014; Schaufeli and Taris, 2014). Moreover, the use of mixed methods can be complementary (Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2010; Joulilié, 2020). Critical realism in particular “overcomes the objectivist/subjectivist and qualitative/quantitative dichotomies, because it is methodologically pluralist and inclusive” (Vincent and O’Mahoney, 2017, p. 212). As such, critical realism is not inherently at odds with quantitative methodology, but rather with those quantitative methods which are viewed as offering a ‘weak’ approach to addressing matters of causality or, for instance, where causality is seen as identified purely based on observations of constant conjunctions between events (Fleetwood, 2001; Edwards, 2005; Mingers, 2006). An intentionally exaggerated critique of quantitative positivist explanation offered by Easton (2000, p. 213) is that these “‘explanations’ are simply summaries of relationships among a set of variables” in being based on repeated observation of covariation.

The present study does not suggest causation, but rather explores potential for such processes and mechanisms. This requires methods more suited to

the in-depth, exploratory nature of the research, taking into account a larger multiplicity of influences than quantitative methodology and related theoretical models can usually accommodate (Edwards, 2005; de Jonge, Demerouti and Dormann, 2014). Qualitative research methods in JD-R based studies can help understand how events (e.g. the salience of job resources and influences on their relations with individual outcomes) are shaped by the specific conditions in which they take place (e.g. the relevance of public sector reform and professional values) (Maxwell, 2009; Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017). This is because qualitative research methods offer the ability to explore the different levels of meaning of such phenomena in situ to tease out demi-regularities and differences (King, 2004a; Maxwell, 2009; Kessler and Bach, 2014). As Ackroyd and Fleetwood (2000, p. 14) put it, "Investigation switches from the consequences, that is from the outcomes (in the form of events and their patterns) of some particular human action, to the conditions that make that action possible."

Adopting qualitative methods allows to some extent research participants to be treated as experts on their own jobs, lives and experiences (Muñoz de Bustillo *et al.*, 2009; Piasna *et al.*, 2017, p. 173), not only to describe what is good, bad and/or important about them (Gallie, 2007a, p. 7) but also to aide explaining why this was viewed as such, and how such interpretations had changed. In the present study, this was intended to enable a pluralist perspective on exploring the subject matter, rather than the typically unitarist conceptualisation prevalent in work psychology and its models (e.g. Bal and Dóci, 2018).

Participants' accounts were considered to provide insights into their experiences of, for instance, public sector reform and job conditions within their respective contexts influencing data collection and research instrumentation decisions in order to gather sufficient data for comparison, to maintain some degree of comparability and accuracy between accounts (King, 2004a; Maxwell, 2017). However, such 'lay accounts' have to be

evaluated and analysed carefully as these are inevitably subject to actors' subjective interpretations of their situation based on the concepts these actors hold of themselves and their situation at that moment in time, what is knowable about their situation to them, and what is disclosed but also potentially not disclosed by them (Fleetwood, 2005; Thompson and Vincent, 2010; O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014). This is more extensively detailed under Sections 5.3. and 5.6.

### 5.3. Case study selection and data collection methods

A case study approach has implications for further design of the research in terms of data collection choices, such as sampling and instrumentation, as well as analytical implications. The first section of this part of the chapter introduces the case study settings and instrumentation choices. Initial scoping interviews and reading of documentary sources helped identify two case studies particularly relevant to public sector reform in the light of austerity; namely Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) and Further Education (FE) colleges. These are characterised by organisational restructuring as a commonality but yet otherwise facilitate contrasting comparisons (see also Appendix A). Semi-structured, key informant and (focus) group interviews across these cases were conducted as detailed under Sections 5.3., 5.4. and 5.5. The selection of respective research sites and participants, as well as limitations, are discussed. Data analysis techniques are considered in the penultimate section before concluding with a reflection on the influence of the researcher on the knowledge claims made in this research.

### 5.3.1. Macro- and meso-level context sampling logic

Considering that an aim of the thesis is to offer a contextualised, pluralist adaptation of an occupational health and work design model to take into account the employment relations within which jobs are embedded. This involved several considerations around sampling, regarding the macro- and meso-level contexts. To move beyond the assumption of unitarism and thus account for conflicting or diverging interests in the thesis' conceptualisation of the employment relationship, a focus on competing ideologies was deemed to offer a means for teasing out and reflecting on such diverging interests. At the macro level, the UK public sector in which the state as employer holds a strong ideological commitment to the neoliberal paradigm (Chapter 1) thus was selected to represent ideological aspects surrounding employer interests which shape characteristics of work and employment (Bach, 2016). Identifying the ideology of professionalism as antagonistic to that of the neoliberal state as presented in Chapter 3 provided the focus at the meso level to reflect on contextual influences relevant for understanding experiences of work and employment through the lens of job demands and resources.

The selection of case studies therefore necessitated being characterised by an adequately large, single-occupation sample population, within sectors which had undergone public sector reform in the light of austerity. Scottish FE colleges and Fire and Rescue Services offered the potential to focus on a single occupation's set of working conditions, each having experienced large-scale organisational restructuring, alongside a breadth of complementary reform measures driven first and foremost by economic rationalisation; that is, the need to accommodate a tight, reduced public sector budget. The thesis sought to explore *how* professional values interacted with experiences of working conditions and the various dynamics under study, rather than *whether* professional values matter. The latter has been discussed in

sociological literatures in terms of professionalism as providing the 'content of control' (Noordegraaf, 2007) over working conditions sought by the professional 'projects' (Larson, 1977). Occupation, according to Bakker and Demerouti (2017), shapes the particulars of what aspects of a job constitute demands and which resources. Therefore, the occupational sampling strategy centred on enabling comparisons, namely selecting occupations characterised by a different nature of work (i.e. emergency work – FRS – and knowledge work – FE). The core dimensions identified as relevant in contextual comparison are presented in Appendix A.

The public services in Scotland provide a unique contextual backdrop to the study of public sector reform and austerity measures. This unique quality is because while it has budgetary ties to Westminster, there is a variety in devolved over reserved legislative powers held by the Scottish Government and Westminster, respectively. Considering the comparatively smaller size of the Scottish public sector landscape compared to England or the UK as a whole, the methodological rationale for selecting the Scottish context rested on the potential for a somewhat more straightforward delineation of some of the characteristics of the macro-level national context of public sector reform measures in which occupational case studies are embedded. For example, organisational restructuring measures in the form of mergers at the national macro-level or sectoral recruitment freezes were easier to identify in their scope/scale than the potential equivalent at, for example, the English-level. As was argued under Section 5.1., appreciation of contextual characteristics is crucial for critical realist inquiry. This macro level context for the Scottish context is further summarised under Sections 6.1 and 7.1. and mapped out in comparison in Appendix B.

### 5.3.2. Scoping and documentary sources

Documentary sources openly accessible to the public provided a starting point in identifying potential case studies within the Scottish context. These documentary sources are: trade union or other professional and employer association publications (specifically, collective agreements, briefing notes and reports); Scottish Government White Papers, Commission and Committee reports, Acts of Parliament, transcripts of minutes of meetings or parliamentary committee hearings; reports by Audit Scotland or other external agencies tasked with reviews and independent reports (e.g. consultancy reviews and commissioned academic reviews); and publications by public sector organisations themselves (e.g. strategy documents, organisational statistics, workforce planning, briefing notes). Considering the explorative nature of the scoping phase in the research, only the most relevant documentary sources were considered during this phase. Even for documents relevant to the Scottish context, there was a vast quantity of sources relevant to public sector reform for the time period under study, namely post-Great Financial Crisis (post-GFC) to the early stages of the fieldwork (i.e. 2010 to 2016). Accessing all such documents was not necessary for the purposes under consideration.

A more systematic review of relevant documentary sources was conducted once case studies had been identified, further in order to build a better understanding of the context of public sector reform (regarding the logics of 'economy', 'efficiency' and 'effectiveness') and the mix of measures effecting changes in job characteristics/working conditions (RQ1). These documentary sources (as per the types detailed above) comprised of documents openly available online and spanned the sectoral level to the specific branch/organisation level (e.g. union briefing notes pertaining to specific fire stations, Audit Scotland reviews into particular colleges). Documentary sources relating to, for example, specific organisational branches are not referenced in the thesis where this is seen as potentially contributing to



compromising the anonymity of research participants. While this provided an initial overview of the measures as a whole, more data gathering was needed to produce a more fine grained context-specific understanding. Documentary sources and key informant interviews are considered to provide detailed, in-depth insights into the purposes and means of specific public sector reforms as well as their connection to characteristics of public sector work and employment (as synthesised in Appendix B). These sources provide information on the institutional elements of jobs in public service (Daniels, 2006). Documentary sources in combination with scoping interviews and relevant academic literature to the case studies informed subsequent interview guides as well as triangulation (Maxwell, 2011, p. 128; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014, p. 299), the analytic strategy for the latter being discussed under Section 5.3 of this chapter.

As well as a reading of documentary sources relevant to public sector reform in Scotland in the years following the GFC, eight scoping interviews with nine key informants were carried out between January and July 2016 (see Table 5.1 for types of organisations and positions represented). Generally, scoping interview participants were selected because of either their in-depth knowledge of particular parts of the public services or broader knowledge of how the public sector landscape in Scotland overall and frontline workers had been affected by reforms in the context of Westminster austerity. Aside of three interviews more broadly focused on gaining an understanding of the public sector reform and policy landscape in Scotland, to guide the identification of potential sectoral case studies further scoping interviews covered the police, prisons, further education (FE) and fire and rescue services (FRS) in Scotland as well as local authorities and some of the breadth of occupations embedded within these. Prior reading of documentary sources pointed to these sectors as relevant for studying professions/-alisation and/or structural reorganisation and quantitative adjustment measures.

**Table 5.1: Scoping Interviews with Key Informants**

Interviews by type of employing organisation	3 x Trade union (TU)/professional association bodies KI scoping interview 1 x TU umbrella organisation KI scoping interviews 2 x Scottish Government KI scoping interviews (1 x expert on local government and 1 x expert on the Scottish Government's Fair Work agenda) 1 x FE college KI scoping interview (pair interview) 1 x FRS KI scoping interview
Interviews by position of Key Informant	3 x Assistant general secretaries/area chairs 4 x Organisational/departmental heads 1 x Area manager (participant acronym 'AM') 1 x Team leader (accountability and local governance oversight / policy development in local authority community planning)

The decision was made to include participant 'AM' in the main FRS case study sample as a result of the interview's relevance and utility to the case study considering that a semi-structured interview guide had specifically been developed for the scoping interview based on relevant themes from documentary sources. One of the two senior management participants in the FE pair scoping interview was interviewed again individually during the fieldwork process to more explore relevant topics in greater depth (participant acronym 'P33'). The findings of these scoping interviews with key informants showed the widespread, yet fractured impact of public sector reform in the light of austerity within the Scottish context. In combination with a synthesis of an initial reading of documentary sources, reorganisation measures were

identified as a common public sector reform approach in Scotland and thus informed the selection of case studies.

The selection of public sector case studies characterised by organisational restructuring in the form of mergers is particularly pertinent to the Scottish context. Westminster fiscal austerity and associated public sector budget cuts in effect translated into the Scottish context through the Barnett-Formula. Whilst the Scottish Government under the SNP at the time vocally opposed Westminster's austerity (e.g. SNP, 2017, p. 4), organisational restructuring was to some extent seen as a means to implement cuts in creating economies of scale whilst attempting to preserve overall service provision. As Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017, p. 25) have noted 'efficiency gain' seeking cuts and 'doing more with less' narratives are perceived as less threatening "so it may be claimed that savings can be made without too much pain". Case studies that experienced organisational restructuring in the form of mergers could thus be argued to be illustrative examples of austerity measures in the Scottish context.

While the further parts of the public services in Scotland explored as part of this scoping phase would have also proved interesting case studies in terms of public sector reform (e.g. local authorities, prison services), considering the study's focus on professional values, case studies comprising a large single (semi-)profession population were deemed preferable. This in effect resulted in the identification of three potential case studies all sharing the commonality of organisational restructuring as a reform measure, but characterised by differences in the scale and scope of restructuring, industrial relations, and the nature of work anticipated to have implications for constellations of job demands and resources. Although the cases share a commonality (Mason, 2002, p. 126), as a result of these former differences, the cases to varying degree represent 'contrasting cases' allowing observation of broader contextual variety (Henry, 2009). The three identified cases concern the following sectors: Police Services, Further Education

Colleges and Fire and Rescue Services. Whilst Police Scotland would have been a desirable third case study, this case had to be dismissed owing to difficulty in gaining access. Further Education lecturers are considered a professionalised occupation according to the UK Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2010 (ONS, 2010), whereas firefighters (FF) are considered an 'associate professional occupation' but were deemed relevant to the study of professional values taking into account what has in academic literatures been identified as a strong occupational identity (Lee and Olshfski, 2002).

### 5.3.3. Data collection: Scoping interviews with key informants, frontline interviews and focus groups

The previous section described the value of documentary sources and key informant interviews to gather information on the specific public sector reform measures characterising each case study. This allowed understanding of how these might connect to changes in job conditions as well as in providing an initial outline of (the more institutionalised aspects) of job conditions themselves, such as collective agreements detailing pay scales, working hours and times and so on (RQ1). Documentary sources, such as those detailed under Section 5.3.2., are also useful in providing descriptive information, such as the overall prevalence of sickness absence within a particular group of workers, organisation or sector (RQ3).

Documentary sources also allowed triangulation of the accounts of research participants (Maxwell, 2011, p. 128; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014, p. 299). Key informant interviews with HR, senior management and senior as well as branch level union officials were conducted. Semi-structured interview guides for each type of key respondent overall focused on reforms that the

sector had been subject to post-GFC and the implications these have had funding-wise, for the way in which the respective organisations operate, HR policies/practice, the impact on frontline staff, and industrial relations. Example scoping interview guides for key informants are included in the appendices; namely the FRS union interview guide (Appendix G) and for management, the College principal interview guide (Appendix H). These overall interview themes were supplemented with additional questions depending on the type of respondent. Prior familiarisation with documentary sources provided background information on issues pertinent at a local organisational level.

As the research seeks to understand job conditions from the perspective of the participants within the context of professional values and public sector reform (RQ2), further semi-structured interviews with frontline workers were chosen “to explore different levels of meaning” (King, 2004a, p. 21). Semi-structured interview guides were developed from the themes identified in the literature review as well as documentary sources and scoping interviews. These covered general questions on how participants thought that recent reforms, such as organisational restructuring, had affected them, in their daily work and their employment conditions; how this resonated with what was important to them in their jobs; aspects of their work they experienced negatively (e.g. demanding, stressful or which they disliked); what coping resources they thought they had available (RQ2); and ultimately what the individual outcomes of all these factors have been for them, such as in terms of sickness absence, intentions to leave, or enthusiasm for work (RQ3). Job resources were operationalised as positive aspects of the job and those perceived to help cope with demands, whereas job demands were operationalised as negative aspects of work (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Eurofound, 2017).

Asking about exemplary/critical incidents was used to probe further where appropriate, such as whether participants could recall and describe a

situation in work more recently when they felt particularly enthusiastic or positive about their work. Examples of interview and focus group guides for each case study (FE and FRS), as well as job demand and resource prompts (referred to as 'demands' and 'appeal in joining their job' with follow up questions) are included in the appendices; e.g. the semi-structured interview guide for FE lecturers (Appendix C), the firefighter focus group guide (Appendix D) and the job resource (Appendix E) and job demands (Appendix F) prompt sheets. These prompts were used to stimulate further discussion on the key foci of the research in a time sensitive manner. The prompts were used to reflect on how the items listed had changed since the latest set of public sector reforms, what were seen as the causes of such changes and participants' attitudes towards the changes. The job demands and resource prompts were based on items identified from the literature. Items from a professionalism scale (Hall, 1968; Snizek, 1972) and Public Service Motivation / Ethos (PSM/E) scale (e.g. Perry, 1997; Vandenabeele, 2008; Kim and Vandenabeele, 2010; Rayner *et al.*, 2011; Kim *et al.*, 2013) were adapted as exploratory interview questions to empirically identify prosocial values (see the job resource prompt sheet in Appendix E). These adapted items resonate with Schwartz's (1994) 'benevolence' values (those focused on having a positive impact on beneficiaries directly or in the immediate environment) and 'universalism' values (those concerned with benefitting notions of the wider public).

With regard to professional values, as participants spoke about their work in combination with the prompts, where time and situational constraints allowed to dig deeper into these, professional values as a frame of reference for participants' experiences emerged. Although the general interview guide was pilot tested (Maxwell, 2017), it was also continually revised in minor ways after the first few interviews; for example, this accommodated the backdrop of industrial action during the fieldwork that characterised the FE case study. In line with Ackroyd's and Karlsson's (2014) argument that the choice of research instruments can be adapted where this is deemed relevant to better

suit a study's purpose, as regards the firefighter case study, following seven frontline FF interviews, individual interviews as a data collection strategy did not generate sufficient data to address the research questions. As a result, a focus group (FG) guide was adapted from the interview guide. Only one further individual interview was conducted mid-way through the fieldwork when the researcher was approached by an individual firefighter seeking to participate in the research.

One of the main advantages of focus groups highlighted by Stewart *et al.* (2015, p. 595) is that "Focus groups allow respondents to react to and build on the responses of other group members". As part of the research focusses on why, in the minds of the participants, job demands have changed and what experiences of work this has led to, encouraging discussion on this proved somewhat of a challenge. In a paramilitary-style organisation which relies on orders being diligently followed in response to potentially life threatening incidents (Childs, 2005; Ângelo and Chambel, 2012; Mather and Seifert, 2017), what would be considered demanding aspects of one's work and what aspects of extreme work had been normalised (Desmond, 2011) was hard to tease out in individual interviews. This goes in hand with the 'heroic' masculine 'don't complain' work culture found in similar occupational settings, such as the police (Turnbull and Wass, 2015). The support of peers, especially in sharing jokes, when dealing with the demands of the job of a fire fighter have been cited as an effective coping mechanism (Sliter, Kale and Yuan, 2014; Young *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, in drawing from existing groups it was hoped that the firefighter's habit of talking about stressful work-related incidents within their crews would produce more discussion on this topic. While caution is required when inviting pre-existing groups to participate in focus group research for ethical reasons (Barbour, 2008), some of these ethical considerations were mitigated for firefighters who have been found to discuss such traumatising incidents among their teams as a coping mechanism (Sliter, Kale and Yuan, 2014; Young *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, participation in focus groups (as opposed to individual interviews which would

guarantee confidentiality) was deemed not to expose any individual's reflection on stressful events in unjustifiable, uncomfortable ways. Rather, focus groups were seen as a valuable instrument to capitalise on this naturally occurring group talk.

Generally, there is agreement that the number of participants sufficient for a research project depends on a variety of factors (Hartley, 2004; Baker and Edwards, 2012; Robinson, 2014; Saunders and Townsend, 2016). One of these factors would be achieving data saturation (should this be desired). Hartley (2004) suggests to terminate data collection for case studies once the researcher feels that another interview will not contribute much new knowledge to what has already been established. Moreover, expert opinions gathered by Baker and Edwards (2012) indicate that the quality of responses will also affect how many participants are needed as well as epistemological and ontological considerations. Saunders and Townsend (2016) conclude that overall consensus for qualitative studies seems to be about 50 participants. This would apply to studies in which participants are chosen from multiple organisations and also analysed as multiple groups. To add credibility to justifying one's own numbers of participants, the authors suggest citing participant numbers of credible studies from similar fields.

The present study recruited a total of 84 participants - 45 FRS and 39 FE case study participants – and visited 20 research sites (see Tables 5.2 and 5.3 for an overall summary).



**Table 5.2: Research Sites, Key Informants and Frontline Participants**

<b>Research Sites (Total=20)</b>	
<i>Fire Stations</i>	11 Fire Stations (9 x main Fire Station Research Sites; 2 x Fire Stations visited for KI/Scoping Interviews)
<i>FE Colleges</i>	9 FE Colleges (4 x Colleges as main Research Sites for frontline lecturer data; 5 x colleges visited for KI interviews)
<b>Key Informants (Total=21)</b>	
<i>Management &amp; HR:</i>	10 Participants (5 per case study)
<i>Union Participants:</i>	Union (senior to branch): 11 (2 in FRS; 9 in FE)
<b>Frontline Participants (Total=63)</b>	
<i>Firefighter Participants:</i>	38 Wholetime FFs
<i>FE Lecturer Participants:</i>	25 FE Lecturers (including 'Dual Participants')

**Table 5.3: Overall Interviews & Focus Groups across both Case Studies**

<i>Semi-Structured Frontline Interviews:</i>	7 FF Interviews 19 FE Lecturer Interviews
<i>Key Informant Interviews:</i>	19 Key Informant Interviews (includes 2 Pair Interviews)
<i>(Focus)/Group Interviews</i>	9 (Focus) Group Interviews (7 x FF Focus Groups; 2 x FE Lecturer Group Interviews)

Part of this large number of participants is explained by the switch to focus groups as a data collection instrument in the firefighter case study and the fieldwork taking place in fire stations which resulted in several participants being absent for some time owing to callouts. While it can overall be challenging to recruit sufficient numbers of participants in qualitative (or any) research (King, 2004a), data collection in the FE case study was also compounded by the fieldwork's backdrop against a fierce period of industrial action and challenges presented by the cycle of the academic year. Limitations in terms of data collection are reflected on further in Section 5.7. Full informed consent was sought from all participants. All participants were informed of the purpose and voluntary nature of the research, their rights regarding their involvement in the research, including issues concerning confidentiality, anonymity and data protection, as well as the nature of this involvement. Further details relating to each case study's data set are presented under the respective case study sections (Sections 5.4. and 5.5.).

## 5.4. Case study 1: Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) in Scotland – Context and data collection

This section details the FRS case study context, how access to participants was gained, and the limitations and ethical considerations inherent in these strategies. The section also discusses the rationale for selection of fire station research sites and frontline interview participants. Table 5.4 summarises the FRS case study participants. Details of the reform context of FRS in Scotland are provided under Appendix B.

**Table 5.4: Fire and Rescue Service Case Study Participants and Sites**

<i>KI Participants:</i>	7 KI Participants: 5 x Management/Back-office Participants 2 x Union Participants
<i>Firefighter Participants</i>	38 Firefighter Participants
<i>Fire Stations</i>	11 Fire Stations: 9 x main Fire Station Research Sites 2 x Fire Stations (KI/Scoping Interviews)
<i>Fire Station by SDA</i>	8 Fire Stations in West Service Delivery Area (SDA) 3 Fire Stations in East SDA
<i>Interviews/Focus Groups:</i>	7 KI Interviews 7 Semi-structured Firefighter Interviews 7 Focus Groups (size of 4 to 5 FFs)

### 5.4.1. Access, limitations and ethical concerns

The initial key informant scoping interview with an Area Manager (subsequently referred to by participant acronym “AM”) took place in spring 2016, whereas the main data collection phase in the FRS case study spanned early spring to late autumn 2017. The AM recommended contacting a senior HR manager for organisation-wide access to firefighter participants. This senior manager was approached, on the one hand, as a potential key informant (subsequently referred to by participant acronym “HR”) and, on the other, to seek access to staff inclined to volunteer to participate in the research. To this end, a summary document was created in order to give a detailed account of the purpose and aims of the research, data collection methods, including a timeline and intended strategy for inviting participants, data management, and the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Forms which were utilised to gain full informed consent of all participants.

Following this, two key contacts in head office business support services were tasked by the HR key informant to liaise with staff and facilitate arranging the fieldwork for the research. Although the interest of the investigation rested mainly with the frontline, namely operational firefighters, these two key contacts suggested initial internal scoping interviews with further types of participants. These internal scoping interviews provided a valuable glimpse into the functioning of parts of the organisation which shape the everyday experiences of the frontline (e.g. operational assurance formulating policy in regard to procedure at incidents; home fire safety), while illustrating how these have further resonated with shaping career trajectories and opportunities available within the newly amalgamated service. This led to key informant interviews including Senior Policy Managers (SPMs) and the first frontline operational wholetime (WT) FF interview with a non-managerial rank (F4). The interview guide which was drawn up for the AM interview was slightly adapted and utilised for the key informant interviews and then

adapted for the HR interview (SPM, F2, F3) and the firefighter interview guide was piloted in the interview with F4.

It should be noted that although career structures in the organisation had and still were undergoing change, they largely still reflected the traditional, more rigid career paths which had traditionally been closed to 'civilian' recruitment. Consequently, the vast majority of back office administrative staff at the time of the field work (2017) still identified as 'firefighters' having come from an operational background before moving into office-based (so called 'non-operational') roles. These interviews (AM, HR, SPM, F2, F3, F4) confirmed interest in the focus remaining on frontline operational wholetime firefighters.

The two key contacts facilitated access to fire stations at the request of the researcher, sometimes directly and in other instances in putting the researcher in contact with Local Senior Officers (LSOs) to organise the visits, although not all requested stations could be visited within the timeline available. The sampling strategy for firefighter participants is addressed in Section 5.4.2.

Considering the traditional para-military command and control style of the organisation, a concern was any coercion in organising the field visits and recruitment of participants. However, the key contacts were aware of the voluntary nature of the research and negotiation of access with the frontline appeared genuine rather than dictated. This was further addressed at the field visits, either in discussion there and then with line management first and/or again once the crew had been assembled, when the purpose of the research, issues around confidentiality and anonymity, and any involvement in the research of potential participants were explained to operational management and staff themselves. It was also emphasised that even though a visit had now been organised, there was no pressure nor any negative repercussions in opting not to go ahead with participating in the research and

that this could be terminated at any point. Two potential focus group participants thereafter chose not to proceed in being involved in the research.

As far as the two stations requested to visit which then could not be accessed are concerned, in speaking to the respective key contacts, in one fire station it appeared no volunteers could be identified before saturation had occurred (WSDA, urban). As regards the other, the responsible LSO tried to steer fieldwork away from that fire station (East Service Delivery (ESDA), urban). Considering that firefighters frequently found themselves on so called 'detached duty' or on 'orange days' this meant they spent time working at other stations outside their regular crews. Through such channels news travelled within the service. Indeed, the rumour-heavy, 'gossipy' nature of this was commented on by several FF participants. In focus groups, some tensions regarding an envisaged change in specialisms later therefore transpired in relation to the above ESDA fire station. However, as such issues had also come out in other focus groups, not being able to access crews at that one station was not thought to have seriously impeded the breadth of perspectives and quality of data generated from the sample.

The data gained from the focus groups has some limitations. During one of the focus groups two of the four participants had to respond to several callouts leaving only two participants behind (FG3; notably only a watch manager and crew manager remained). This impeded the breadth of perspectives gained during this focus group. Moreover, in another two focus groups, one participant each, respectively, had to leave mid-way (FG2; FG7); one excused himself to take a phone call (F16) and the other excused himself to deal with paperwork following interruption by a callout (F40). It should be noted that the focus group that participant F16 was part of (FG2) was not the original fire crew that had in advance agreed to and been scheduled for fieldwork. The scheduled fire crew had to respond to a callout and FG2 members took an interest in the researcher's presence and research offering to jump in instead. A firefighter from the original crew later

approached the researcher by email seeking to participate in the research and an individual semi-structured interview was arranged (F19). Two focus groups faced interruptions by callouts or scheduled Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs) (FG5; FG7). During that time, the researcher once waited in the communal area in the kitchen, able to observe notice boards, read union bulletins or other professional magazines spread around, and on the other occasion, waited in the offices of the forensics team, adjacent to the fire station, informally chatting to the two on duty forensic crew members present about their work. Another focus group ran over into otherwise scheduled commitments so was continued in two parts on a separate occasion (FG4) with a change in one FF in place of a previous between conversations (F28 in FG4 part 1; F34 in FG4 part 2). On both occasions, the researcher spent time in the kitchen area waiting for the focus group to commence, the second time specifically invited to join the crew during breakfast. The researcher was further able to have informal chats with LSOs facilitating access upon visiting stations.

**Table 5.5: Duration of Frontline Firefighter interviews and focus groups**

<i>Semi-structured FF interviews range of duration</i>		
Min. duration: 21 mins (F5)	Max. duration: 1 hr 38 mins (F19)	Average duration: 53 mins
<i>FF focus group range of duration (excluding pauses &amp; session totals added up)</i>		
Min. duration: 1 hr 24 mins (FG7)	Max. duration: 2 hrs 55 mins (FG4; pt.1 + pt. 2)	Average duration: 1 hr 59 mins

Although not originally envisaged, this allowed observations as to the physical environment of fire stations, the facilities available, routines and additional background information and insights into wider parts of the organisation which provided another data source in the analysis. Table 5.5 gives an overview of the range in duration of frontline FF interviews and focus groups, stating the minimum, maximum and average duration.

## 5.4.2. Research Sites: FRS

The nine fire stations that were selected as main fieldwork sites were located in the West and East Service Delivery area (WSDA and ESDA, respectively). The staffing system (the so called Five Watch Duty System or 5WDS) of the WSDA was rolled out across the unified service and new to the ESDA and North Service Delivery Area (NSDA). This rollout took place whilst the fieldwork had just begun in the WSDA. The five WDS enabled the service to reduce staffing levels without reducing the number of fire fighters manning each appliance at any point in time.

Predominantly, fire stations in urban areas were selected as this offered the opportunity to look at stations which arguably were overall busier and thus, it was anticipated would see a bigger change in the amount and types of callouts received. Two rural fire stations were visited for means of comparison and scoping. To some extent, the focus on more urban areas was dictated by the fact that stations in very rural areas often are not manned by wholetime staff, but by retained firefighters or, as is the case in the most remote areas, solely by volunteer firefighters. Wholetime firefighters are fulltime staff employed in that as their primary occupation. Both retained and volunteer fire fighters have another primary occupation which they get called away from to attend at incidents. Retained firefighters receive pay for this. In order to have some level of symmetry across the two cases, only wholetime staff were invited to participate in the study.



The sub-/urban areas in which the fire stations were located offered variety in resident demography and it was hoped to be able to observe whether cuts to other services, such as social services, would have produced a noticeable knock-on effect on the work of fire fighters in certain areas. The sample also covers a variety of stations: single pump stations, a single pump with specialist appliance station, two pump stations without specialism and two pump stations with specialisms. This variety in stations and equipment allowed consideration of different training needs and types of callouts.

### 5.4.3. Research Participants: FRS

Overall, seven focus groups were carried out and seven semi-structured interviews (see Tables 5.6 and 5.7 for an overview). The numbers of participants in focus groups ranged from four to five firefighters which reflects the crew sizes for appliances. Following the interviews and seven focus groups, it was felt that saturation was achieved as no new perspectives were added (Hartley, 2004). Key informant interviews with a senior HR manager and senior Fire Brigades Union (FBU) figure supplemented data collected among the frontline. In total, 45 participants were recruited but not all were able to attend for the full duration of each session owing to callouts.

For practical reasons associated with doing focus groups in an emergency service it was not possible to exert much control in selecting the participants according to prior work experience or education. However, the existing groups (crews) naturally provided some degree of variety in pre-service experiences. The participants had either learned a trade upon leaving school (often at the age of 16), had some other prior work experience or gone through some further formal education before joining the service. This is in part explained by the fact that an applicant wishing to become a firefighter is required to be at least 18 years of age. A large proportion had learned a

traditional trade and gained work experience. Another significant share of firefighters came from a Sports and Fitness background. Some participants had previous experience within the military sector (Armed Forces, Royal Airforce and Royal Marines). A minority was educated to university degree level. The firefighter participants also offered variety in terms of length of service. Not all participants had experienced the organisational restructuring working as firefighters but this again offered a valuable range of experience.

**Table 5.6: Frontline Firefighter Interviews and Focus Groups**

<u>#</u>	<u>Area</u>	<u>No. pumps</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Type of Data</u>
01	West	1	Rural	1 interview
02	West	2	Urban	3 interviews
03	West	1	Rural	3 interviews
04	West	2	Urban	FG1 (4 participants)
05	East	2	Urban	FG2 (4 participants)
06				1 interview
07	East	2	Urban	FG3 (4 participants)
08	West	2	Urban	FG4 (2 parts; total 6 participants)
09	West	1	Urban	FG5 (5 participants)
10	West	2	Urban	FG6 (4 participants)
11	East	1	Urban	FG7 (4 participants)

**Table 5.7: Key Informant Interviews: Fire & Rescue Service Case Study**

<i>Senior/Mid-Management Respondents</i>	1 x senior HR respondent (“HR”); 1 x Area Manager (“AM”); 1 x Senior Policy Manager (“SPM”); 1 x Back Office Staff (Policy and procedure informing role – “F2”); 1 x Manager – Fire Safety (“F3”)
<i>Union</i>	1 x Senior Union Official (“F43”); 1 x Union District Representative (F6)
<i>Total</i>	7 key informant interviews

## 5.5. Case study 2: Further Education (FE) Colleges in Scotland – Context and data collection

This section details the FE case study context, how access to FE participants was gained, limitations and ethical considerations and the rationale for choosing the sampled FE college research sites and participants.

It should be noted that a detailed breakdown of type of respondent (e.g. principal/HR, union) and college (e.g. non-merged, urban, multi-/single-college region institutions) was not possible for the FE case to protect participant’s anonymity. This was due to the relatively small number of colleges not just overall in Scotland, but of certain types (i.e. non-merged and multi-college region institutions). Subsequent overviews of the FE case study sample given below aim to provide as detailed an insight as possible while mitigating risks of identifiability (see Table 5.8 for an overview).

**Table 5.8: Overview: Further Education Case Study Research Participants and Sites**

<i>KI Participants:</i>	14 KI Participants: 2 x College Principals 3 x Senior HR Managers 9 x Union Participants (senior to branch lvl)
<i>FE Lecturer Participants</i>	25 FE Lecturer Participants (incl. 4 'Dual' Participants)
<i>FE Colleges</i>	9 FE Colleges: 4 x FE Colleges: Lecturer data 5 x FE Colleges: KI Interviews (incl. 2 colleges of 1 'Dual' Participant each)
<i>Colleges by Location:</i>	3 Urban 4 Sub-urban 2 Rural
<i>Semi-structured, Pair &amp; Group Interviews</i>	12 KI Interviews (incl. 2 Pair Interviews; 1 picket line KI Interview) 25 Semi-structured FE Lecturer Interviews (incl. 4 picket line FE Lecturer Interview) 2 Group Interviews (size of 3 FE Lecturers each; both at picket lines)

### 5.5.1. Access, limitations and ethical concerns

The recognised difficulties recruiting participants for qualitative interviews (King, 2004a) were particularly pronounced in the FE case study. Initially, access was granted to a single college through senior management and

under approval of the College Board. HR in the college offered to circulate information on the research among staff on several occasions. This as well as several instances of snowballing from participating lecturers led to seven lecturer interviews. Contact for one union interview was brokered by senior management. However, after several rounds of HR circulating information and checking back with potential contacts, a change in access and sampling strategy was required. The decision to increase the number of colleges visited ultimately proved beneficial to the research to gather a fuller range of perspectives on differences and similarities in how reforms were experienced across colleges of different type (e.g. by characteristics of each college region, such as single compared to multi-college regions) and background in regard to the specifics surrounding college mergers.

Furthermore, the main timeframe for fieldwork coincided with particularly busy times in the academic year (i.e. the end of term before the summer recess and start of the new term) and a period of intense industrial action taken at the end of the academic year. Against this backdrop, the researcher sought to access further lecturer participants in raising awareness for the research at union lobby events by speaking to lecturers there and handing out short flyers containing key information on the research as well as contact details. This resulted in three interviews at one urban college (L23; L24; L25). Parallel to this, union officials were approached as key informants themselves and asked to broker access to further lecturing participants. It was suggested that interviews with lecturers could be held at picket lines to increase their ease of finding the time to participate in the research. Visits at two picket lines were arranged in agreement with union officials acting as picket supervisors. A more compact interview protocol was devised which included a shortened version of the interview guide and version of the participant information to accommodate the more challenging interview environment.

At the first picket line visited, the union official (U8) had pre-arranged three interviews (L9; L10; L11); the same official also facilitated another non-picket line semi-structured lecturer interview (L19). At the second picket line, the union picket supervisor introduced the researcher and purpose of the study. The researcher approached several individual and groups of lecturers intending to leverage the opportunity to speak to as many lecturers as possible and those with a background in a traditional trade in particular. At the time, this demographic was less represented in the lecturing participants. This picket line resulted in two group interviews with three lecturers each, one union official interview and an individual lecturer interview who had approached the researcher to volunteer (L-12-1, L12-2, L12-3; L-13-1, L13-2, L13-3; L14; U15).

Several points should be noted with regard to ethical considerations as well as limitations in the data from the picket lines. Firstly, an ethical concern was whether lecturers seen by management as speaking to someone holding a recording device could make them vulnerable to any ill consequences. In both cases, the researcher and participants sought to move somewhat away from the main picketing area and toward more visual shelter provided by leafy bushes/hedges, elevated landscaping arrangements and/or moving into a cul-de-sac away from the main road.

Secondly, the nature of data collection at picket lines posed some limitations. Picketing lecturers at both sites were asking drivers to honk their car horns, were chanting, cheering, had ratchets and whistles. Windy weather, near traffic collisions, MSP visits, interruptions by phone calls concerning national bargaining updates, malfunctions in pop-up hospitality area equipment organised by and for picketing lecturers occurring in the proximity of the research participants proved challenging for conducting interviews. Being unable to take notes in parallel to the interviews, noise overshadowing responses and other distractions posed by the environment meant that several points were not probed as much as the researcher would have

preferred. The interviews were overall also shorter reflecting the challenging nature of the environment for the interviewees (see Table 5.9 for the average duration of the FE interviews).

**Table 5.9: Minimum, maximum and average duration of frontline FE lecturer interviews and focus groups**

<i>Semi-structured FE lecturer interviews range of duration at picket and non-picket lines</i>		
Min. duration (picket line): 23 mins	Max. duration (picket line): 40 mins	Average duration (picket line): 31 mins
Min. duration (non-picket line): 28 mins	Max. duration (non-picket line): 99 mins	Average duration (non-picket line): 57 mins
<i>FE ('focus') group interview range of duration (2 x picket line only)</i>		
Min. duration: 13 mins (L12-1; L12-2; L12-3)	Max. duration: 52 mins (L13-1; L13-2; L13-3)	

Yet, as the rest of the fieldwork has highlighted, even with interviews in more controlled environments there are constrained time demands and interruptions. Therefore, this is not considered to have impeded the quality of

the data generated. Indeed, these interviews have been an invaluable addition to the research as they offered the opportunity not only to actually access further lecturing participants but to gather a much wider breadth of perspectives. Brinkmann (2013b, p. 46) comments that “[s]ometimes qualitative interviewers do not have the luxury of choosing a sampling strategy, but must stick to the respondents that they are able to recruit”. This rang true in a few instances in the selection of FE participants as rigid adherence to the envisaged sampling strategy proved impossible. Hence, opportunities to speak to participants were seized when they appeared. Rather than this being a weakness, it became clear throughout the process that this in fact added, ultimately, a richer, more diverse set of perspectives. In particular, the initial strategy was for participants, both key informants and lecturers, to have been in post long enough to have experienced the organisational restructuring of their respective colleges. Lecturing participants with no experience of the restructuring offered valuable insights; e.g. bank staff who were covering for lecturers off on long-term sickness absence or lecturers who had recently been hired.

It was also a challenge to recruit management informants who were in post pre-merger as there was a high reduction in staff and turnover at the senior/mid management level. This, however, only affected one FE management informant (HR18). Access to senior management was either brokered through cold emailing (P32; HR18) or through other senior management participants (HR35 through P33; HR34 through P32).

The aim of seeking to speak to union officials beyond relevant branch-levels or senior officials not just as key informants but as ‘dual participants’ helped provide the last few lecturer perspectives, pushing the data gathering of that demographic to saturation. The intention was to capitalise on union office holders primarily first and foremost also working as lecturers. This even applied to the most senior tier of union office holders. The interviews with ‘dual position’ holders began with the same questions as other lecturing



participants, including the same prompts for job demands and job resources, before concluding in a shorter section of union-perspective specific questions.

Overall, the access strategy of picket line visits, lobby events, union rep access brokering and inclusion of 'dual participants' produced a union office holder / union member heavy sample. However, the relative number of 'dual participants' to overall 'regular' lecturing participants is still reasonable (four 'dual' lecturer participants to 21 'standard' lecturer participants). Moreover, this is reflective of the previously mentioned overall high unionisation of the workforce (in 2017 at roughly 79.4% based on the previous figures) and of how the EIS-FELA was organised overall. There was a branch of the union in every FE college in Scotland and these in themselves were well staffed.

Gaining access to four FE lecturers through their dual-position as union office holders is not considered to have impeded the quality of data collected in terms of being overly skewed towards over-representing potentially more marginal views. Indeed, while lecturers who also held union office generally had wide, in-depth insights over the issues most affecting staff in their respective colleges, this did not manifest in any more personal negative views than were expressed by non-union office holding participants where indeed attitudes expressed to (changes in) working conditions were equally if not more so negative in the majority of conversations. Active participation in the union as well as the union's strength overall may have provided a sense of agency and security to the dual post-holder (lecturer/union representative) participants.

There remains the question to what extent the overall high reliance on union members has influenced the dataset and findings that can be drawn from it. The FE case study dataset has been treated with care and continuous reflection to ensure greater rigour in conclusions drawn. It should also be noted that all the fieldwork took place against the backdrop of the Scottish

Government having granted the FE sector in Scotland national-level bargaining as part of the reform package that the sector was subject to following the fallout from post-GFC reforms.

### 5.5.2. Research Sites: FE Colleges

Overall, FE participants were located in nine different colleges in Scotland (see Tables 5.10 and 5.11). This comparatively large number is in part because important key informants were spread out across these colleges and because key informants could not be accessed at all key colleges or declined for not having been in post long enough. Excluding key informants from this and with only one exception ('dual participants' L31-U and L17-U), the vast majority of interviews with lecturers took place across four colleges. The sample includes three key informants from non-merged colleges as in addition to the focus on merged colleges it was felt that this would not only provide a valuable comparison but also emphasise wider-pressures on the sector in addition to those stemming from organisational restructuring.

The colleges selected for data collection among lecturing staff had undergone merger at around the same time, during 2012/13, but are based in different locations. The different locations were selected to reflect differences in the demographics the colleges cater to which, in turn, affect the colleges' Regional Outcome Agreements. Three colleges are situated in an urban location (one of which in a multi-college region), one in a rural single college region and one in a suburban multi-college region. Differences in local demographics relate to, for instance, youth and overall unemployment rates, levels of deprivation in certain areas, or industry-specific differences in employment rates. All such factors influence not only the learning activity in terms of quantity and subject areas to be delivered by each college, but also

wider performance indicators such as, for instance, students having progressed to a 'positive destination'.

**Table 5.10: FE College Research Sites – Number and Types of Participants**

	<b>Participants</b>
<u>CollegeA</u>	1 x Key Informant
<u>CollegeB</u>	1 x Key Informant 1 x 'Dual Participant' 4 x Lecturers (3 x Ls picket line; 1 x L non-picket line interview)
<u>CollegeC</u>	1 x Key Informant 7 x Lecturers (2 x groups of 3; 1 x individual) (all picket line)
<u>CollegeD</u>	1 x Key Informant 1 x 'Dual' Participant
<u>CollegeE</u>	1 x Key Informant
<u>CollegeF</u>	2 x Key Informants (pair interview)
<u>CollegeG</u>	3 x Key Informants 1 x 'Dual Participant'
<u>CollegeH</u>	2 x Key Informants (pair interview) 1 x 'Dual Participant' 3 x Lecturers
<u>CollegeI</u>	2 x Key Informants 7 x Lecturers

**Table 5.11: Characteristics of FE College Research Sites**

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2 x FE colleges in rural single college regions
2 x FE colleges in urban multi-college regions
1 x FE college in a sub-urban multi-college region
1 x FE college in a sub-urban single college region
1 x FE college in an urban single college region
1 x non-merged FE college in a sub-urban multi-college region
1 x non-merged FE college in a sub-urban single region college

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Two colleges had very similar workforce sizes in 2015/16 and student numbers. The other two colleges selected differ from this middle-ground both regarding their workforce sizes and student numbers, by either coming in somewhat above or somewhat below the other two. Overall, the workforce sizes ranged from just over 930 to just over 1,160 members of staff (full-time and part-time) with teaching staff between 350 to 530. Student numbers ranged from 12,400 to over 20,100.

### 5.5.3. Research Participants: FE Colleges

Academic staff in FE are distinct from other professionals found in other parts of the public services. Prior to becoming a lecturer, many FE academics would have already been trained and worked in another profession (Robson, Bailey and Larkin, 2004). The vast majority of the full-time FE teaching staff in Scotland has a teaching qualification (87%) and either has industry experience or is encouraged to go on secondment into the industry to keep skills updated (Colleges Scotland, 2016a). FE lecturers are classified as belonging to a 'professionalised occupation' according to the SOC (ONS, 2010), yet are atypical compared to other professions. Generally, the professional skills, knowledge and control over standards exerted by professional bodies in FE was looser in comparison to occupations which

have traditionally been considered as highly professionalised. There is a requirement to obtain a teaching qualification (such as, for instance, the Teaching Qualification for FE – TQFE) for becoming a FE lecturer but otherwise no prescribed, formalised pathway into teaching in FE (Scottish Government, 2010).

Therefore, the sample attempted to reflect variety in prior career-pathways and subject areas taught. This variety, it was felt, would add to a deeper understanding of further relevant factors with regards to changes in the experience of work and outcomes. It also allowed interrogating the meaning of professional values from different perspectives and career stages.

The lecturers who participated in the research covered a broad range of taught subject areas which related to STEM and natural sciences; humanities and social sciences; business studies; traditional trades (e.g. joinery, carpentry, electrical and automotive engineering); health sciences and information and communications technology (ICT) subjects. Levels taught spanned across the full range offered by Scottish colleges, namely from level National 1 awards equating to basic access credits to Higher National Diploma (HND)-level equating to third year direct entry into a bachelor's degree at a university (SCQF, 2017). Moreover, the sample consisted of lecturers at various stages in their lecturing career, including a few lecturers who had joined after the post-16 Education 2013 Reform Act (Scotland) had come into effect and organisational restructuring had taken place. Even though these lecturers had not gone through the recent reforms to colleges in their academic posts, getting their perspectives on issues relating to colleges in comparison to those who had been in the sector for much longer was valuable.

Interviews with lecturers were supplemented with key informant interviews in order to, on the one hand, gain additional, macro-level information (Bogner, Littig and Menz, 2009, chap. 3; Maxwell, 2009, p. 234), and on the other, to

later on facilitate triangulation of findings (Mason, 2002; King, 2004a). Such interviews were carried out with HR managers, principals and union officials.

The interviews with HR managers were intended to gain an understanding of how contextual factors such as, for instance, changes to the funding structure or the move back to national level bargaining have affected HR policy and practice. Moreover, interviews with key informants from HR were also intended to shed light on how reforms to the sector may have affected size and composition of the workforce. Interviews with principals sought to establish, at a more overarching level, how changes and pressures from the environment, such as the reclassification of colleges as public bodies, changes to the funding structure and other reforms relating to the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013, have affected the way in which colleges are run. These interviews also looked at whether and why there were changes in variety and levels of courses offered, and changes in the student demographics. The implications of this for the academic workforce were also of concern.

Lastly, interviews with union officials as key informants allowed insights on what the workplace-related key issues were that lecturers brought to the attention of their local union representative. The union interviews gave sector-wide insights on the reinstatement of national level bargaining to the sector as well as the industrial dispute that was ongoing during the fieldwork period.

## 5.6. Analysis

This section discusses the analytical approach taken to the data collected within the two sectoral case studies. The purpose of the study was to examine the dynamics of working conditions in the context of professional

values and the positive or negative individual outcomes these may produce. To this end, as detailed under Section 5.3.2., the research gathered information from multiple sources reflecting the several conceptual levels of analysis. Documentary sources and key informant interviews were analysed to map out the nature and shape of public sector reform that had affected the parts of the public services within which the case studies were embedded. These sources further facilitated evaluation of changes to working conditions and triangulation. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with frontline professionals across the two case studies to gather information on occupation-level influences in relation to individual perspectives on changes to working conditions and their individual-level outcomes. The subsequent sections detail how this has informed the analytic approach overall, before presenting the specific data collection procedures.

### 5.6.1. Analytic approach

According to Maxwell (2017, p. 28) interviewing produces descriptions of the perspectives of interviewees, which does not necessarily equate to “a direct understanding of their perspective.” The analysis of qualitative data is concerned with developing such an understanding considering further that there may be views interviewees either may be averse to disclosing (Brinkmann, 2013a; Maxwell, 2017) or keen to espouse based on the perceived social desirability of expressing certain views, such as ‘over-reporting’ altruistic motives (Bickman and Rog, 2009; Cascio, 2012; Kim and Kim, 2017). In particular, social desirability may have affected statements of the importance of material rewards, altruism (or prosocial values), in focus groups, or of negative mental wellbeing, in particular in the FRS case study. Participants were assured of their anonymity to attempt to mitigate such bias (Bickman and Rog, 2009) although this may have been less effective in pair or group interviews (Barbour, 2008, pp. 66–68).

By and large, perspectives expressed by and interactions with research participants during the fieldwork suggested interviewees felt able to express themselves freely, disagreeing with each other as well as the researchers' questions and correcting the researcher where questions based on the latter's understanding failed to accurately capture their views. In a very few instances, participants seemed to be 'holding back' which appeared connected to the privacy offered by the interview location available (a study room in a college library) or feeling disengaged by the questions asked. This is discussed as part of a wider reflection on the study's limitations later in this chapter.

Participants as much as the researcher have a stake in the information relayed during research interviews. This may influence what information is disclosed and consequently the withholding of certain views by various types of participants such as frontline or management (Brinkmann, 2013a; Maxwell, 2017). As was indicated above, the fieldwork suggested an overall willingness by participants to share their views which were further compared to documentary sources and key informant interviews. Considering that the study's purpose was to explore how participants saw themselves, how this related to changes in their work and employment and experiences thereof, participants' accounts therefore were treated as representing their 'real' experiences (King, 2004a). As was argued in Section 3.5.3., while, for instance, professional claims to altruism have been contested by conflict perspectives of the professions, this research was not concerned with evaluating the 'truthfulness' of such claims to altruism. Instead, the research sought to explore how these espoused values were understood by members of an occupation under study (e.g. what constituted as having imparted a positive impact on immediate beneficiaries or the wider public) and how this related to views of characteristics of professional work and employment and reform-driven changes.



Consequently, several analytical techniques were employed. All conversations were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, supplemented with field notes and entered into qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12. Memos accompanying the coding and analytic process were also captured in this software (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014, pp. 95–99; Mann, 2016, p. 209). Transcription sought to be mindful of pauses, whereas strong regional accents, mannerisms of speech (e.g. ‘no’ being utilised to mean ‘not’) and incorrect grammar were maintained so as to reflect participants’ (and the researcher’s) unique voices and conversational details of analytic relevance (Mann, 2016, chap. 8). Software assisted coding in several cycles following a coding framework which was revised several times was the initial step taken to break down and separate data by its content. Several coding techniques recommended by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) were employed. The following analysis further separated chunks of data out utilising MS Excel spreadsheets (non-quantitatively) as a tool for better visual representation of parts of data relevant to drawing out themes. This further aided comparing and contrasting segments of data, presenting rival explanations, and triangulation. Moreover, such a data breakdown facilitated a better overview of how widespread or dominant certain views were among the sample. These as well as further procedural decisions taken in the process of data analysis are further detailed as follows. It should also be noted that Saldaña’s (2009) argument, that ‘themes’ as patterns, trends or concepts are the outcomes of the analytic process which may typically involve coding as an analytic method, is shared. Codes here are therefore not the same as ‘themes’.

### 5.6.2. Coding

As coding allows condensing large amounts of data down to only those relevant to the study as well as offering a tool for reflecting on the data’s

content or meaning (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014, p. 73), an initial first cycle coding structure was drafted. This initial coding framework was drawn up based on relevant concepts identified in the literature, the levels at which these are situated conceptually, as well as being informed by familiarisation with the content of the interviews through transcription and re-reading. Data from each case study was separately indexed following the initial coding framework. The literature review provided the foundation for operational definitions of codes where needed and for additional clarity in identifying which segments of data to index under which code(s) (e.g. altruistic or prosocial values). Literature also was applied to codes relating to the operationalisation of job demands and resources (see Section 5.3.3.).

The coding framework was refined and modified as the coding proceeded (King, 2004b). However, this initial cycle produced too many codes to be manageable leading to another cycle of revision of the coding template and re-reading of the data. As Saldaña (2009, p. 8) has pointed out “[r]arely is the first cycle of coding data perfectly attempted.” ‘First cycle’ coding techniques such as ‘descriptive coding’ and ‘in vivo’ coding were employed (Saldaña, 2009; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014). In particular, ‘in vivo’ coding proved to be particularly useful in the FRS case study as certain phrases threaded, sometimes significantly, through the interview and focus group data, such as ‘helping people’ and ‘saving lives’. Such a shared ‘vocabulary of motive’ (Mills, 1940, in Spillman and Brophy, 2018) proved pertinent to the study’s focus on professionalism and a shared occupational identity. Interviews with FE lecturer participants, though permeated by recurring patterns in content, such as the importance of professional standards, judgement and integrity, did not offer similar neat ‘sound bites’ equally as suited to ‘in vivo’ coding. For both cases, the additional data on participant demographics were also captured in line with ‘attribute coding’ (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014, p. 79). Segments of data resonating with multiple codes were coded under each pertinent code in what Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014, p. 81) refer to as ‘simultaneous coding’, while

being mindful of whether too many such occurrences may have suggested a poor fit between coding framework and data (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014, pp. 85–86). Contrasting views were included where appropriate.

After the initial, revised coding framework was drawn up based on relevant concepts identified in the literature and other codes expected to be relevant (such as some 'in vivo' codes), the pieces of text in broader codes such as 'how training is delivered' or 'training quality' were re-indexed into more specific codes. In the subsequent cycle of coding, the data coded into the broader initial codes was re-read seeking out narrower content descriptions according to which these were further re-coded; for example, 'hands-on, practical or team-based training and learning as accepted knowledge formation systems vs computerised training'.

### 5.6.3. Key informant data and documentary sources

Key informant interviews were coded into relevant codes within the main coding framework for frontline respondents' data where appropriate, such as for triangulation. Some separate codes for key informants were added reflecting the overarching nature of (some of) the perspectives offered by key informants. Key informant interviews as well as documentary sources (such as governmental statistics, trade union publications, organisational publications) further were used to evaluate and triangulate the frontline participant findings (Richards, 1996; Maxwell, 2011, p. 128; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014, p. 299). These documentary sources concerned: trade union or other professional and employer association publications (specifically, collective agreements, briefing notes and reports); Scottish Government White Papers, (Commission and Committee) reports, Acts of Parliament, transcripts of minutes of meetings or parliamentary committee

hearings; reports by Audit Scotland or other external agencies tasked with reviews and independent reports (e.g. consultancy reviews and commissioned academic reviews); and publications by public sector organisations themselves (e.g. strategy documents, organisational statistics, workforce planning, briefing notes). Although all of these documentary sources were openly available online, ethical considerations influenced the extent to which reference could be made to them within this thesis. These are referenced in the case study chapters where this would not introduce a threat of increased identifiability and thus compromise participants' anonymity. In the FRS case study, seeking to conceal the organisation under study would have been near impossible while giving sufficient contextual details for the analysis of findings. In the FE case, the focus was not on individual FE colleges and having gained access through senior management provided some reassurances. The documentary sources were critically examined in relation to bias inherent within them as suggested by Coffey (2014) and Bell and Waters (2014, pp. 113–114). To this end, attention was paid to, for instance, who authored the document, what purpose it served, what it did and did *not* say. Similar caution was applied to reflection on the key informant data (Richards, 1996).

Analysis of management and HR as purely key informant data was unambiguous, however, union representative interviews required further evaluation of analytical processes, also in connection to the particulars of the sampling strategy in the FE case study. Participants with union duties across both samples were analytically evaluated as follows. Generally, union participants on full remission from their primary occupation were treated purely as key informants (F43). As regards interviews with union representatives who were not on full remission, i.e. the lay representatives interviewed, these were evaluated primarily as key informants where half or more of the interview was focused on insights gained through their union duties (i.e. F6; U8; U15; U16; U20; U21 ; U22; U28; U29). Parts of the interviews focused on the union perspective were used to supplement,

evaluate and triangulate frontline accounts. However, the experiences of these union representatives of practicing their occupation themselves and thus of job conditions experienced by their peers were not discounted. Therefore, where appropriate, personal accounts of TU representatives were added as further frontline participant material while bearing in mind the potential of some bias introduced by this approach.

Interviews with participants with union duties which predominantly focused on individuals' personal experiences were subsumed under the frontline sample, yet segments of the conversation relevant to triangulation supplemented key informant data. This applied to the 'dual' lecturer participants previously detailed as well as F14. F14's involvement in FG1 was based on personal views having only disclosed being a union branch official toward the very end of the FG. In the consecutive discussion of findings, participants identified primarily as KIs were not included in 'counts' of frontline views or else this was made explicit, for instance, where reference is made to 'over half of FE lecturer and union participants', whereas 'dual' participant perspectives were treated and counted as part of the main frontline sample first and foremost.

#### 5.6.4. Additional analytical steps

##### *Identifying comparisons*

In addition to the above coding of the interview transcripts using qualitative data analysis software NVivo, data segments were further entered into MS Excel for each case study to aid drawing comparisons and for more flexibility in the visual presentation of segments of data. In the first instance, two spreadsheets were drawn up to capture the selections made by research participants on the job demands and job resources prompt sheets. While the intent of issuing such lists was as prompts to stimulate conversation on

relevant topics in a time-sensitive manner, entering the selections in a table offered another advantage. The prompt sheet data was not designed to be used in a quantitative manner. However, in counting the number of selections made for each item (see, for instance, Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014, pp. 233–34), this provided a degree of reassurance in analytical conclusions drawn by comparing the most selected items (both per participant group and per item) with the topics that had sparked more animated discussion during the conversations. As Saldaña (2021, p. 22) cautions, the frequency of occurrence of a code (relating to a recurring topic of conversation) does not necessarily point toward those having the biggest impact. While not without limitations, this comparison allowed some more confidence in analytic interpretations as reflections represented participants themselves, thus addressing to some degree potential ‘researcher bias’ (Maxwell, 2011, p. 124).

Further segments of data were entered into further spreadsheets by codes or content of interest. This was found useful in allowing greater flexibility in visually representing segments of data unafforded by NVivo so to draw comparisons in placing contrasting or similar views next to each other, highlight frequencies, combining segments coded under separate codes in novel ways and a more fine grained break down of statements. As a result of the text heavy nature of responses generated through semi-structured interviews and focus groups, segments of text indexed into codes using NVivo could at times be coded ‘holistically’ (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014, p. 77) and therefore several paragraphs long, especially for focus group material in parts of the conversation in which a large proportion of participants had more vocally weighed in. Breaking such data passages down per group, participant and combination of codes visually in a spreadsheet, drawing on various formatting options and reducing text segments down to short paraphrases, sometimes supplemented by a direct quote, or a simple ‘X’ to mark agreement to a statement, aided data condensation as part of the analytical process seeking to draw out

commonalities, differences, and contrasts in attempting to generate meaning. Further comparisons between the case studies were easier to draw in this manner. This was supplemented by 'clustering' codes together in the process of deriving meaning from the data. Several analytic techniques suggested to improve the quality of conclusions reached in generating meaning from the data were adopted, such as 'clustering', 'making contrasts/comparisons', 'counting', 'checking for rival explanations', 'partitioning variables', and paying attention to outliers, extreme cases or negative evidence (in terms of further sub-dividing a code's content) (Maxwell, 2009; Yin, 2013; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2021).

The final analytical step involved drawing up a spreadsheet for cross-case comparison in order to be able to explore patterns in the dynamics between macro-level context, professional values, the two dimensions of working conditions and individual outcomes for addressing the research questions. The spreadsheet developed for RQ2 compared each of the working conditions detailed in the conceptual framework and findings chapters (Chapters 4, 6 and 7) and their corresponding professional values against the specific reform-measure driven changes in either the characteristic of work itself, related characteristics of work (as compounding factors), or less directly related characteristics of work revealed as relevant, in order to make more abstract observations about the conditions and mechanisms upon which the salience of a job characteristic hinged as well as whether these were evaluated positively or negatively and why. The spreadsheet developed for RQ3 followed a similar structure first stating the working conditions detailed in Chapter 4 and their corresponding professional values to then evaluate whether positive or negative effects had been amplified or whether positive or negative effects had been reduced and by what (changes in other job characteristics and/or relations with professional values), relating these to pertinent individual outcomes and giving examples from the data.

### *Analysis of group interview data*

As the research is not concerned with the study of the interaction of the group participants *per se* (Steyaert and Bouwen, 2004; Morgan, 2010), group interactions were somewhat neglected in the analysis unless disagreement occurred. Rather, the group interaction was hoped to ‘nudge’ participants who may be more reserved. Analytically, agreement between participants was taken as reflecting shared views. Transcripts of group interviews were also coded ‘holistically’ (Saldaña, 2009, p. 19; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014, p. 77) as appropriate in order to account for the contributions of various participants to a given part of the conversation, including relevant interactions with the moderator. Where comments were unrelated and no significant “synergistic effect of the group setting” (Stewart *et al.*, 2015, p. 595) had taken place, only chunks of text relevant to the code, irrespective of the group interaction, were coded as such. It also should be acknowledged that often the engagement with the views of one group participant by the others was somewhat minimalistic which facilitated the decision to pay minor attention to the interaction of the group in generating knowledge.

There are some caveats to representations made in the subsequent presentation and discussion of findings resulting from utilising focus groups and pair interviews. Firstly, as concerns both case studies, where agreement between participants was not murmured but shown through physical motions, such as nodding, inherently audio recordings were not able to capture this (Barbour, 2008; Stewart *et al.*, 2015; Mann, 2016). While notes were taken during and after group conversations, the central concern was to ensure as far as possible that pertinent issues captured in the interview/focus group guides were covered and to follow up on areas of interest, such as unexpected points or comments. Therefore, it was not possible for these notes to capture most of such physical movements or facial expressions except for stark examples. However, the total occurrence of this was less prevalent than murmured agreement and as much as possible the moderator



prompted focus group participants to express whether they agreed with a statement made by one of their peers.

As far as the FRS case study specifically is concerned, not all participants were able to attend all or most parts of the conversations. Most notably, focus group 4 was carried out in two parts, during the first of which F28 on a 'head for head' was in attendance and F34 during the second part. As there was variety in the length of absences and phases during the conversations when the absences occurred between these participants, for simplicity in most cases these were counted as part of the total participant number against which individual counts per topic were compared in order to reflect on how widely certain views or sentiments were shared among the sample. Therefore, the subsequent presentation of findings regarding what rough proportion of the FF sample shared which view are not absolute. However, this is not deemed to have compromised the overall quality of the participant group and its relevance for addressing the research questions. In most instances this likely has at worst resulted in an underrepresentation of certain perspectives.

## 5.7. Limitations and reflexivity

### 5.7.1. Limitations

A central limitation of the qualitative case study methods is that findings cannot be generalized to a population but only allow for analytical generalisation (Gibbert and Ruigrok, 2010). Analytic generalisation, according to Yin (2013), concerns the abstraction of ideas from the case study findings which may equally apply to phenomena beyond the cases studied originally. In this vein, the research has offered a broader examination of the dynamics of working conditions in the context of

professional values and the positive or negative individual outcomes these may produce. The case studies were selected for their representativeness of different professional groups experiencing reorganisation as a result of public sector reform under austerity. The two case contexts allowed exploration of the particulars of such reorganisation measures and further characteristics of the occupations under study. A multi-case study design strengthens the ability to draw analytical generalisations (Rowley, 2002; Yin, 2013). As was noted earlier in this chapter, a third or fourth case study sharing more similarities to either of the cases presented here, such as Police Scotland, or with a lesser degree of professionalisation would have been desirable in order to transfer and test the conceptual propositions made in this study within different case contexts.

Another limitation of the data is connected to the choice of research methods. The pragmatic approach to data collection instrumentation in the FRS case study has produced some degree of asymmetry between the case studies' data sets. However, bearing in mind that focus groups were conducted in order to generate discussion rather than to study group dynamics *per se*, this asymmetry is deemed acceptable. Yet, this inter-group dynamic may also have influenced the accounts given by participants in two ways. Firstly, it was necessary to find a balance between not offending the goodwill of participants. For example, balancing the often more communicative watch and crew managers (who were also gate keepers to the remainder of the crew and time granted the researcher's visit) while trying to engage quieter participants at times proved challenging. Nonetheless, the use of focus groups was justified as these still allowed engaging such quieter participants through naturally developing conversation between their peers rather than the more artificially created conversation during individual semi-structured interviews. Secondly, because firefighter crews are tight knit socially as a result of the nature of the work and because line management form part of the team (and as such participated in most of the focus groups), this may have affected what participants were willing to disclose so not to be seen as

a 'moaner' or a weak member of the group. While this cannot fully be ruled out using such methods, even within the more private setting of individual semi-structured interviews wanting to, for instance, not be seen as admitting to 'weakness' and discussing mental health issues also is possible for an occupation which constructs much of its identity around heroism.

Time constraints and the nature of data collection sites, namely speaking to on duty firefighters in fire stations and conducting FE lecturer interviews at picket lines or in cafes, limited the ability to ensure that data collected from all participants was as symmetrical as possible in terms of avoiding gaps in several ways. Loud background noises and interruptions propelled not only time pressures on ensuring as much as possible of the interview guides was covered, but also presented challenges in transcribing the interviews. However, while the occasional word or short phrase even after repeated listening to and manipulation of the audio replaying settings remained indecipherable, only a very small amount of data was lost this way and the adjacent parts of the conversation were sufficient to understand the meaning of the full sentence. Overlaying talk during focus groups whereby participants spoke on top of each other or, though much more rarely, background chatter of participants between themselves whispering on issues often non-related to the research during another participant's 'turn' to speak, also resulted in some gaps in the data. Some of the background chatter could nonetheless be transcribed and overall this was an infrequent occurrence. In the FRS case study, interruptions posed from callouts in some way also offered the advantage of being able to observe the stations and hold informal chats with, for instance, station managers who had facilitated access or forensics staff. In FE colleges, a few interruptions encountered mainly emanated from the surroundings of the picket lines visited, a need for finding another private room to continue the interview, such as switching from a seminar room to a study room in the college's library, or other participants scheduled next interrupting to check on the timings and flag up their time constraints.

These constraints to some extent affected the depth with which all parts of the interview guide could be covered, including data gathered from individual participants through the use of the prompt sheets pertaining to job demands and favourable aspects of the job. This affected both case studies but even more so data collection in the FE lecturer case study. This limits the extent to which the frequency of selections made on these prompt sheets can be used to further evaluate interview or focus group data. However, the primary purpose behind the prompt sheets was to stimulate conversation, in particular as regards the FRS case study. Therefore, such gaps in the data are an unfortunate but nonetheless acceptable limitation. Though time constraints are frequently encountered in qualitative interviewing (King, 2004a), for future research more focused on professional values where these constraints may apply less depending on access that could be negotiated, the use of vignettes (Mann, 2016, pp. 107–8) or of mixed methods, such as observation alongside qualitative interviews and documentary sources as, for instance, utilised by Wright *et al.* (2020), may further identify and delve deeper into the specific meanings and understandings of professional values beyond the set explored in this research.

### 5.7.2. Reflexivity

This chapter has detailed the steps taken in an attempt to give as accurate an account as possible from the perspectives of participants. However, considering the nature of social research and this study's research design in particular, it cannot be claimed that the study is free of the influence of the researcher. In this vein, McGovern and Alburez-Gutierrez (2017, p. 99) have argued that "As qualitative researchers study experiences and interpretations, they themselves become the research instrument as their ability to observe, listen and talk are all essential in gathering evidence." Consequently, it is important to acknowledge, understand and shape in

constructive ways, the researcher's influence on the research (Maxwell, 2009). In this study, unwarranted influences of the researcher were addressed by formulating non-leading interview questions (Maxwell, 2009) and in terms of some of the techniques recommended by Miles *et al.* (2014, p. 293) for testing and confirming findings, such as being mindful of an 'elite bias', triangulation of findings, or checking outliers.

Several further influences of the researcher, which have inexorably shaped the data collected, should be made explicit. The transcription stage of analysis revealed a small number of missed opportunities to encourage participants to elaborate further or give concrete examples. This was caused by time pressures, background noise and other distractions at the research sites. Overall, the researcher kept notes of points to probe as interviewees were speaking, but inherently this was not possible at picket lines.

Linguistically, it should be acknowledged that the researcher is a non-native English speaker who has conducted the research in this non-native language to her. Depending on nerves and factors influencing concentration posed by the research environment, such as background noise, a few follow-up questions were posed with incorrect grammar and thus misinterpreted. However, the impact of this is negligible as participants either asked for further clarification or responded to key words, giving a good depth of discussion, perhaps even beyond what the original question would have asked for. There was further very minor confusion introduced by the researcher requesting the FRS for 'access to firefighters' instead of access to wholetime, operational firefighters, being at that point somewhat oblivious to the fact that most members of the organisation still identified as 'firefighters' even if they were no longer in an operational role. Yet, this led to three key informant interviews providing useful background information and a better understanding of structures within the organisation, how they had changed, and the occupation. Another stemmed from the use of 'critical incident

technique' as an interview technique, as 'incident' has a more specific meaning in firefighter parlance.

## 5.8. Chapter conclusions

This chapter has presented the research design and approach suited to addressing the research questions identified in Chapter 4. This has outlined an analytical framework capturing the several levels of analytical relevance; namely (1) the macro-level reform and the connected fiscal policy context in which public sector work and employment are embedded, (2) profession level influences (professional values as encapsulated in shared identities), (3) two sets of working conditions spanning characteristics of work and employment (job demands and resources), and (4) individual experiences of this inter-dynamic of influences. Qualitative case study methods were deemed relevant to explore how these relations compare across occupational contexts. The rationale for the selection of two case studies, Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) and Further Education (FE) colleges in Scotland, was presented, as well as further access, sampling and research instrumentation decisions. The analytic strategy detailed needed to take account of the several levels of analysis. The structure outlined in the analytical framework was built on the logic of the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 4, and is used to organise the presentation of findings in the following chapters using the above levels in descending hierarchical order.

## *Chapter 6. Fire and Rescue Services in Scotland*

This chapter presents the findings from the Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) case study. It draws on the sources detailed in Chapter 5, comprising primary data, the analysis of which has been informed by documentary sources (see Section 5.3.2.). The chapter is organised into three substantive parts following the structure of the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 4. Therefore, this chapter first briefly considers the mix of reform measures that have affected FRS in Scotland in the context of austerity (Section 6.1.) which are in more detail mapped out under Appendix B. The influence of these reforms on experiences of working conditions as job demands and resources in firefighting in the context of occupational values is evaluated. The chapter considers these influences in regard to the salience and experience of quantitative and qualitative job demands in firefighting (Section 6.2.), before evaluating this dynamic in regard to job resources for firefighters (Section 6.3.). The subsequent discussion of the salience and experience of resources at work in a public sector reform context through the lens of professional values is structured to begin with extrinsic job resources, followed by social job resources spanning extrinsic to intrinsic levels, and, lastly, intrinsic job resources in firefighting. The final substantive part of this chapter (Section 6.4.) considers how these influences have shaped the above described dynamics in relation to experiences of individual job outcomes.

## 6.1. The public sector reform context of work and employment in Fire and Rescue Services in Scotland

The purpose of this section is to provide a brief reflection on the dynamics of public sector reform with changes in the characteristics of work and employment as relevant to contextualising experiences of job demands and resources for firefighters. This discussion is based on Appendix B, which details the core reform measures implemented across the FRS case study under the phase of austerity as informed by the logic of the ‘three Es’ of ‘economy’, ‘efficiency’, and ‘effectiveness’ introduced in Chapter 2. The details of reform measures provided in Appendix B incorporated relevant, publicly available documentary sources alongside information from key informants as specified in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.3.2. for details).

As part of the Scottish Government’s public sector agenda to reduce the overall number of public bodies, Fire and Rescue Services were merged into a single organisation. This saw the amalgamation of the eight previous Fire and Rescue Services into a Scotland-wide service under the Police and Fire Reform Act (Scotland) 2012. The unified service started operating in 2013 (Audit Scotland, 2015b). Audit Scotland (2015b, p. 8) noted that “*Although not a stated objective of reform, one of the main reasons [for the merger] was to save money, with cumulative net savings of £328 million expected by the end of 2027/28.*” A reduction of just over 31% in budget in comparison to the cumulative budget of the eight legacy services was expected to be seen in the years from 2012/13 to 2019/20 (Audit Scotland, 2015b). The report also highlights that these savings were to be achieved by eradication of duplicate support services, rather than frontline operational staff. Staff-related expenditure accounts for just below 80% of costs. Overall, in 2014 the unified service employed 8,486 staff, of which just under half were wholetime fire fighters (Audit Scotland, 2015b). The overall number of wholetime firefighters



had sunk to 3,645 in 2017 (SFRS, 2017a). There were 356 fire stations across Scotland in 2017 (SFRS, 2017a). The majority of these stations are crewed by retained firefighters (240 stations), whereas 74 stations are crewed by wholetime (WT) staff and the remainder by volunteer crew.

Considering that workforce compensation related expenditure comprised for the vast amount of operational costs (Audit Scotland, 2015b), this formed the overall aim of reform. Pay freezes or below inflation increases were implemented for wholetime (WT) operational firefighters as these are determined in negotiation at UK level. However, further direct measures following the logic of 'economy' arguably are trickier to implement, at least as far as wholetime (WT) operational firefighters are concerned, considering that staffing levels are calculated based on risk and negotiated with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). Thus, various measures aligned with the logic of 'efficiency', namely the organisational 'amalgamation' of the prior eight FRS into a nationwide service, were seen as allowing to reduce the size of back office staff and associated costs. Efficiencies in the utilisation of labour at the frontline were sought through changes to a different shift roster requiring somewhat fewer staff. These lower staffing levels were achieved through recruitment freezes and the non-replacement of retirees or leavers. The logic of 'effectiveness' saw strengthened central control in placing the service under direct oversight by the Scottish Government illustrating, perhaps, the cold fiscal climate in relation to tightened fiscal oversight.

## 6.2. Job demands in firefighting and professional values: The significance and positive or negative experiences of intensity in work

### 6.2.1. Quantitative job demands in firefighting: Intensity in the volume of work and working time

The effects of public sector reform FRSs had undergone in the context of an increasingly cold fiscal climate as detailed in Appendix B and evaluated in their impact on characteristics of work and employment for Scottish firefighters detailed above (Section 6.1.) were connected to increases in quantitative demands reported across the case study sample.

#### *Professional values and changes to the volume and pace of work as job demands in firefighting in a reform context*

As Appendix B details, one of the saving measures targeted at meeting the service's reduced budget saw staff reductions among the frontline which were facilitated through a change in duty system to the 5GDS. WT FF reductions in line with the new duty system's lower staffing requirements were made through recruitment freezes and non-replacement of retirees. The balancing of staffing needs with such 'natural wastage' may explain part of the ongoing staffing issues at time of fieldwork alongside staff leaving prior to their anticipated departure from the service. The change in shift pattern required a 'full establishment' for it to run effectively, namely that FF numbers matched those required under the resource based crewing model precisely. The 5GDS was argued to reduce the need for previously additional staff

forming part of overall rostered crewing levels at certain stations to act as buffers for absences (so called 'extra bodies'). Under the 5GDS, instead of relying on extra bodies, FFs could be called in for working time 'owed' on 'orange days' under annualised working hours arrangements if given 48 hours' notice.

While the shortage of somewhere around 36 WT firefighters (depending on documentary source consulted) detailed in Appendix B may not seem much *per se*, it needs to be highlighted that under the 5WDS these could technically mean that somewhere near up to as many appliances could potentially go off the run at any one point as a result of a lack of available staff to crew these at safe levels agreed with the union. Even though it is possible to call firefighters in on 'orange days' to cover absences, frequently it was reported that appliances went 'off the run' (FG1; FG2; FG3; FG4; FG5; FG6; F6; F7; F19) because no such cover could be organised. A FF explained:

*“But on any given shift, you can guarantee at least one – most of the time it's way more than one – there's pumps sitting off the run because there aren't guys to crew them.” (F37)*

Moreover, there were two further issues that seemed to have aggravated the ability to crew appliances. On the one hand, staffing issues may in part be compounded by the 48 hours' notice period that has to be observed on 'orange day' call-ins. On the other, the WT FF staffing shortages also need to be considered within the context of sickness absence numbers. According to a union representative (F6) *“it is a big, big thing - people being off.”*

Ultimately, the reduction in overall firefighter numbers that manifested itself in understaffing contributed in part to a work intensification that could be observed in sub-/urban fire stations. The effects of the understaffing on quantitative job demands were discussed in the majority of conversations. Staffing shortages had two effects on work intensity, firstly by reducing the

number of appliances available for incident response during some shifts and secondly by increasing involuntary overtime.

As regards an intensification of incident response, where appliances had to 'go off the run' owing to a lack of appropriate numbers of staff to safely crew these, the remainder of fire engines was then reportedly busy providing cover for an area (FG1; F14; F19).

As well as the effects of understaffing, changes in the frequency and nature of callouts manifested in changes to workloads. While, as captured in Appendix B, there had been a decrease in response to fire-related incidents since 2013/14, attendance at 'Assist Other Agency', 'Medical' and 'Effect Entry' type incidents had increased since 2013/14. As a result, there overall was a slight increase in the total number of incidents responded to compared to, for instance, the previous year (SFRS, 2018a). These increases were generally noted across the FF sample (FG1; FG2; FG3; FG4; FG5; FG6; FG7; F4; F5; F8; F10; F19). Generally, most FRS case study respondents explained either that responding to certain or a breadth of at times random incidents had always been in the nature of their job, expressed being happy with having taken on additional tasks or to not 'mind' the prospect of expanding these further in connection to the 'transformation programme' (Appendix B), further depending on whether these resonated with the occupation's purpose of helping people, in particular in terms of 'saving lives'.

Indeed, over a third of FRS case study participants of varying lengths of service (and, crucially, including several recent recruits) had indicated to have been drawn to work in emergency response and into the job for the excitement and variety they perceived it offered wanting (F4; F9; F13; F20; F21; F22; F23; F24; F26; F30; F32; F35; F36; F37; F39) which was different to the realities of being on the job or how it had changed. Being busy in terms of emergency response was by most seen as a desirable, positive aspect of work.

Problems associated with workloads concerned large quantities of new procedures, the associated paper trail and administrative workload, also of enhanced scrutiny mechanisms, compounded by a lack of integration of legacy brigade policies. Indeed, 'bureaucratic rules and procedures' was a frequently cited issue and discussions of related issues, such as the associated administrative burdens, permeated most conversations with FFs, although both in terms of quantitative and qualitative demands. Most significantly, line management was affected by this. Station managers (or officers) used to be, as the name suggests, in charge of a single station which was increased to around three stations. Some of their workload was transferred on to crew and watch managers as well as that of office assistants in a few stations:

*"I suppose the workload has increased massively. [...] We used to have a cook, an office assistant, a station manager, all in the station and they're all gone so it's left up tae the watch managers, myself, tae deal with all the paperwork, administration, everything like that." (F8)*

To most crew and watch managers (F8; F11; F14; F20; F23; F24; F29; F33; F34; F39; F42), large frequent quantities of new policies and procedures and associated administrative burdens demanded increasing amounts of their time. Indeed, during the visits to stations as part of the fieldwork, meeting room and office walls cluttered with notices and awareness briefings were not an uncommon sight. Several participants reported having to or seeing their line management having to take on more paperwork, some of which previously would have been carried out by the station manager (F8; F10; F13; F17; F24; F27; F29; F33; F35; F36). In addition, crew line management was expected to pass or act on information acquired from, for instance, perpetually increasing numbers of awareness briefings. Increasing paper trails as a result of requirements to record all activities in at times various places were further aggravated by non-interlinking IT systems (F8; F14; F20; F23; F24; F28; F29; F33; F34; F39; F42). A few FFs also commented on the increase in record keeping and administrative part of the job (F9; F11; F13;

F21; F25; F27; F32; F35; F36; F37). As about half of the fieldwork took place after the Grenfell tower fire in London in 2017, the procedures that followed were highlighted by crew and watch managers as an example of a 'knee-jerk' reaction (F24) and 'unachievable' (F20 & F23) in terms of a suddenly tremendously large workload.

Consequently, workloads associated with emergency response in certain contexts could be seen as a challenge demand to firefighters, whereas being busy with less desirable tasks or tasks which are associated with adverse psychosocial demands, such as negative management styles, arguably may constitute hindrance demands and be more salient. This is further explored in Section 6.2.2. on qualitative job demands in firefighting.

### *Experiences of working time extensification in firefighting as a job demand in a reform context*

Involuntary overtime as a result of understaffing also seems to have contributed to an increase in work intensity in instances where either FFs had to stay on at incidents at the end of their shifts waiting for cover in relief crews to be organised, stayed on at the station at change of watch until cover in the next watch was resourced or being sent out on detached duty upon arrival for ones shift adding extra time on at the end of the shift for travel back home via one's usual place of work (FG2; FG4; FG6; FG7; F19). A FF voiced their frustration in regard to unwarranted overtime at the end of a shift and disorganised staffing leaving a station short at the end of a shift "*...the expectation is that we'll stay. But we've been here for 16 hours*" (F41).

However, overtime per se was not necessarily always seen as negative depending on the individual's financial circumstance welcoming the opportunity for additional earnings. According to F17 overtime could also be advantageous in offering a means for raising more pay but as F36 discussed

when overtime was unsolicited as a result of no relief being available at the end of one's shift this could be negative.

### 6.2.2. Qualitative job demands in firefighting: Psychological and physical intensity in work

The 2013 reforms introduced in the light of Westminster fiscal austerity sought to further expand the eventualities FF crews could get mobilised to so to increase 'productivity' in gaining efficiencies in how the workforce was 'utilised'. In this context, in addition to increases in quantitative demands laid out in the preceding section, novel or enhanced qualitative job demands in firefighting could be noted. Changes in the nature of tasks carried out by firefighters, further within the context of changes to training provision, appear to have contributed to increased psychosocial demands in firefighting. These primarily concern a sense of role conflict and adverse managerial relations. Lastly, the otherwise positive appeal of the physical demands posed by the job is evaluated in the context of maintenance of operational fitness and retirement age increases.

#### *Professional values and experiences of psychosocial intensity in work for firefighters in a reform context: Role conflict and emotional job demands*

While the role expansion as envisaged under the 'transformation programme' was yet to be rolled out at the time of fieldwork, as well as a result of the effects of the preceding reforms, changes in the nature of incidents FFs would be mobilised to were compounded by the combination of stretched public services and an inter-agency agreement between blue light emergency services in Scotland to increase co-operation. This agreement

stipulated that fire crews would be mobilised to assist the Scottish Ambulance Service to ‘effect entry’ as co-responders, rather than first responders, ‘*in theory*’ (F30; F33) at least. In practice, however, this agreement had resulted in the majority of participating fire crews having experiences of being despatched to ‘effect entry’ arriving as the first on scene prior to the ambulance. Crews, even if not involved in trials surrounding, e.g. OHCA or OHCA+ (i.e. a wider role for FFs), could upon arrival on scene effectively encounter incidents that would fall under the OHCA+ umbrella and beyond, such as STFs (slips, trips and falls). A union representative explained:

*“...the Scottish Ambulance Service are under so much pressure, they’re actually calling out other stations that are not involved in the trial and saying it’s to open a door. So sometimes we’ll turn up at a medical response to open a front door for the ambulance service to get in and the ambulance isn’t actually even in attendance.” (F6)*

As crews were not yet supposed to be mobilised to OHCA+ events or other initiatives (except for where this was trialled), such as STFs, and could have arrived first on scene before the ambulance, some participants reported to have found themselves exposed to incidents for which they felt inadequately trained and otherwise unable to provide much (or any) assistance (FG1; FG5; FG6; F25; F26; F29; F32; F33; F34) or knew of other crews who had been in that position (FG6). In being sent on ‘out-duty’ (or ‘detached duty’) to cover absences, which frequently affected ‘two pump’ stations (Section 6.2.1.), FFs could also find themselves working a shift at a trial station. Increases in casualties encountered by FFs were starkly noted in the years following the implementation of the blue-light emergency collaborative working agreement (around 2013) (see also SFRS, 2018a, p. 25) which presented different or increased emotional and cognitive demands. In official trial stations, station managers were therefore mobilised to assist their crews with OHCA incidents in acknowledgement of these different psychosocial job



demands. Inevitably, this did not apply for crews outwith trial stations and for incidents initially flagged as 'effect entry'.

The key issue with the proposed (or any) task expansion to the vast majority of FF respondents related to feeling competent and adequately trained for carrying out those tasks. The senior union participant (F43) explained that the training requirements for maintaining competence in core occupational skills only allowed for role expansion at stations without pre-existing specialisms, such as swift water rescue:

*"...maintaining core competence as a firefighter is a big, big chunk of that training pie if you like. There's not an awful lot of it left but there's just about enough to add an additional skill." (F43)*

The combination of training having decreased in quality and frequency as a result of budgetary pressures (including the effects of understaffing on the availability of appliances and therefore time available to train as discussed in more detail in Section 6.3.3.) with the more alien nature of the task expansion in relation to (perceptions of) the traditional fire and rescue role, such as incidents requiring more medical knowledge, had presented objections to carrying out such tasks under these circumstances and produced discomfort in potentially feeling incompetent and unable to help. The vast majority of FFs pointed out that under the training they had received they did not feel comfortable responding to certain incidents, such as OHCAs, but would be happy to do so if given adequate training. Around half of participants considered this 'the right thing' or as supported by the occupation's purpose and value of 'helping people'/'saving lives'. Several FF participants further indicated that expanding their role was preferable in helping to preserve their jobs. A firefighter deliberated:

*"...as long as you train then you feel competent [...] the more things we do, the better because it justifies the number of staff there are within the service, it justifies the existence of the service" (F18)*

The extent to which a new task was seen to be ‘helping people’ and ‘saving lives’ played a part in mitigating or reducing some scepticism towards changes or in garnering acceptance of or support for new tasks overall (such as HFSVs or the prospect of responding to OHCAs) for the majority of FF respondents. This also would depend on training provisions, a core coping resource to firefighters, being deemed adequate for response to such incidents (see Section 6.3.3.).

Increasing exposure to casualties, tasks associated with a lower chance of achieving a positive outcome (such as OHCAs) alongside concerns around how FFs as responders would be perceived by those affected and their families presented an intensification of psychosocial demands. Not being able (or allowed) to help, whether that, for instance, be as a result of restrictive procedures or of feeling ill-equipped (both in terms of equipment and expertise/skill) to carry out a task, was cited as a source of frustration, ‘a totally different kind of stress’, ‘scary’ or feeling uncomfortable (FG1; FG5; FG4 F26 F34 F25; FG6; F19). Key informants Senior Policy Manager (SPM) and HR recognized the different emotional demands posed by such tasks outwith of FFs’ central area of expertise and as such ‘comfort zone’ (SPM).

The HR respondent also detailed the different emotional demands posed by OHCAs in terms of a higher likelihood of fatalities given the altered relation with those involved in incidents including their families:

*“The support that they can give is much more limited, uhuh, and it’s not their field [...] so I think that can be frustrating for staff, you know, and quite often when they’re called the person has passed away by the time they get there, you know, so then they have to deal with the family and the whole emotional response that goes with that” (HR)*

By the same token of concern around not being able to help, two participants (F20; F23) indicated to cope with the psychological demands of exposure to fatalities by considering whether a life was saveable in the first place

irrespective of any intervention. Indeed, as far as OHCAs are concerned there was a very high probability that this would be the case (HR).

Further concerns related to whether such an expansion opened the gates into potentially undesirable task domains and issues of implementation, such as having to give injections to casualties and working with needles (F38). Several participants expressed concerns around how the new tasks would be implemented in practice anticipating, for instance, that a screening of calls would not be done well as the perception already was that firefighters were simply sent to anything (and as some indicated they always had been anyways). F30 feared that *“When it’s [response to OHCAs] going to start to kick in, we’re going to get sent to every drunk person that’s lying in the street”*.

How the work of firefighters would be perceived by members of the public or those involved in incidents was a concern shared by around a quarter of respondents, in particular in relation with feeling unable to intervene effectively. However, F20 and F23 rejected such concerns stating that FFs’ work usually was anyways watched by the public. Several FF participants expressed unease in terms of the expectations of those having called for an ambulance to be sent a fire engine and in terms of being watched by the public or family at an incident (FG1; FG4; FG6; F10; F19; F26; SPM) which was intensified when they felt unable to help and offer adequate interventions. *‘Standing there, looking stupid’* (F26) not being able to help, *‘you don’t want to be turning up and kinda scratching your head a little bit’* (SPM), being left to *‘twiddle [your] thumbs’* where Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs) failed to work (F32) or *‘looking unprofessional’* (F15) where a HFSV was interrupted by numerous callouts were some of the concerns voiced in regard to how FFs felt perceived by the public.

Several participants stated that if circumstances were reversed, as those affected they might not feel as though they were getting the appropriate emergency service responding to their call. A key informant explained:

*“...if you look at out of hospital cardiac arrest in isolation, it’s a level of expectation as well. So if it’s your mother or father or brother or sister, they’re expecting an ambulance to turn up at your door and they’re not expecting a fire appliance with guys with fire kit on and a defib and a trauma bag.” (SPM)*

As well as posing increased psychosocial demands, the at the time discussed and de facto further expansion of the role of firefighters appeared to threaten some of the bases of experiencing task significance. Generally, the extent to which FFs ‘minded’ doing a certain task, alongside these ‘helping people’ and ‘saving lives’, in a few examples further seemed connected to beneficiaries’ attitudes towards them, namely whether beneficiaries would be grateful, showed recognition or appreciation, and the purpose of the novel tasks, such as these facilitating scrutiny from external to the occupation or out of touch management.s

### *Professional values surrounding sources of legitimate authority and control and psychosocial job demands*

In addition to issues surrounding the previously described task expansion, further instances of role conflict to a smaller proportion of the sample related to a perceived ignorance of firefighters’ professional expertise, knowledge and, ultimately, experience and therefore authority. This manifested in ideas as to whom was seen as a legitimate source of authority or direction and in terms of being expected to carry out tasks that conflicted with professional ideas on how best to operate.

New tasks or rules and procedures to some extent conflicted with frontline professional ideas as to what their duties were first and foremost (e.g. rescuing someone), what would work and how duties would be carried out

well and efficiently. Several groups of respondents indicated that at the frontline it was often felt that new procedures were ill-informed, impractical, potentially dangerous and ignorant of the knowledge on what works and what does not resting within the frontline (FG7 F39, F40, F41, F42; F19; FG3 F20, F23; FG4; FG6). Several FF respondents discussed how, owing to the diverse nature of the incidents crews could be called out to, previously FFs had been able to or demanded by the situation to be creative and improvise in order to help people (as well as save lives) rather than following protocols (sometimes under unpredictable events) designed by those lacking an understanding of working on the frontline (FG5; FG4; FG6; FG7; F19; FG2 F17) although views on this were somewhat mixed. A couple of focus group participants voiced their frustration for being called to incidents to then not be allowed to help in ways they saw necessary owing to procedures. This was seen as potentially a choice between following procedure and 'watching someone die' or saving someone and getting disciplined, as they said had happened to a fellow firefighter in the North (F36 and F37). 'Whether their ability to help would be called into question' in such a way was more widely by this focus group seen as crucial for garnering acceptance to taking on more tasks of a medical nature (FG6), otherwise preferring to not be mobilised to find their hands tied.

In addition, a few objections to new rules and procedures seemed connected to a perception that these had been formulated by staff lacking the same operational insights held by the frontline, such as by civilian staff or far detached management. It should be acknowledged, however, that within the case study's sample, those respondents involved in formulating procedures and guidance still (often not that long ago) had themselves come from an operational background as opposed to being civilian staff (SPM; F2; F3), although F3 indicated that there had been some increasing degree of civilianisation on the fire safety audit side at least. Both F2 and F3 further also had been promoted into their roles with limited or no operational experience at a certain level of seniority. Both Moreover, back-office

functions which would traditionally have either been carried out at station level by firefighters themselves, such as organising crewing, or been staffed by previously uniformed personnel were seen to have become increasingly civilianised or were taken over by staff with what was deemed otherwise limited experience (FG4; FG7; FG5). A watch manager voiced his frustration at the increasing civilianisation of back office functions:

*“it’s wee lassies [HR staff] that are coming tae discipline meetings, right? They’ve got nae idea about the fire brigade, they’ve got nae idea of how this job works (F24)*

In the case of managing station level staffing, these duties were taken away from frontline professionals and transferred to civilians in a centralised administration department. This generated feelings of frustration for some firefighters in the ESDA in instances where something that used to be done by firefighters themselves at station level then failed to be executed to the same quality by others, such as civilians (FG2; FG3; FG7; F15; F17; F18; F19; F20; F23) which felt “like a slap in the face” (F41; F42). An example are the issues around organising crewing for appliances as previously discussed (Section 6.2.1.). In this sense, this then could be seen as connected to an erosion of autonomy that rested at the level of the occupation.

The civilianisation of management could also be seen as in part connected to firefighter complaints about managerial behaviour. The vast majority of firefighters cited poor management behaviour as a negative aspect of work. This was generally seen to have emerged or become pronounced since the latest reforms (FG2; FG3; FG4; FG5; FG6; FG7). The combined pressures of tighter control from under central government than prior local authority governance arrangements, in combination with increased opportunities for the career minded to be seen as delivering on performance targets, and a civilianisation of (senior) management may have been influential factors. Feeling unfairly treated, lacking voice, and frequent negative feedback were key issues. A FF (F42), to the agreement of F39 and F41, described their

frustrations in relation to poor treatment by management they felt subjected to as getting “a slap on the wrist for everyone in the whole of Scotland” for a simple mistake by a single one of their peers, being “treated like rubbish” or “like a child”, management not “lik[ing] anybody on station anymore” which had resulted in a “humungous divide” and “vaster chasm [...] than ever was before [...] between management and the workforce”.

A lot of examples of such behaviour related, for instance, to the ways in which achieving targets was managed. Two focus groups (FG4 and FG6) negatively commented on management’s approach to comparing a watch’s performance against targets between groups (i.e. watches). These pressures in relation to having to meet targets, in combination with an increase in managerial scrutiny, accounted for a significant part of overall discussion in interviews and focus groups relating to demanding aspects of work (F6; F7; FG3 F23 and F20; FG5 F32, F33, F29; FG7; FG6; FG2; FG4; FG1). F27 particularly resented such negative inter-group competition and comparison which may be seen as a threat to the otherwise strong sense of social cohesion required by the nature of the job itself and fostered through socialisation:

*“Yous did 20 so yous is great and you’re rubbish. So they’ve [management] got us working against each other like a little competition how many home fire safety visits can you do” (F27)*

Issues with managerial styles, however, did not only relate to the management of targets, but also to an erosion of pockets of autonomy away from line management to middle management or central administration. As a result, a couple of FFs described feeling ‘micro-managed’ (F33; F37). For example, the planning of activities for the shifts of their respective teams of firefighters as regards training, community engagement and home fire safety visits was moved out of being the responsibility of the watch or crew manager to middle management (station managers) (FG2; FG3; FG4; FG5; FG6).

Part of the perceived causes in this shift in management styles to some extent seemed to be the belief that management had ulterior motives and was driven by self-interest in career advancement (FG2; FG4; FG5; FG6; FG7, F7). Moreover, a few (FG4; FG5; F24) again saw part of this linked to an increased civilianisation of some organisational functions. This connects to previous arguments in relation to whom was seen as a source of legitimate authority and of the value attributed to professional cohesion instead of the in effect *'ever bigger chasm'* between management and FFs (F42), whereby management was no longer seen to *'have your back'* (F24; F25; F27) or to at least *'stab you in the front'* (F34). This importance attached to a sense of social cohesion between FFs and management is illustrated by the somewhat throwaway joke two FF respondents made when asked what they liked about their work, namely Christmas dinners *'when the bosses make them'* and *'do the dishes'* (F38 F36).

### *Professional values and physical job demands in firefighting in a reform context: Challenge or hindrance job demand*

While it was in the nature of the job to be highly physically demanding at incidents, this physically active side of the job was an aspect of work that about a third of respondents valued. Around half of participating firefighters had indicated a preference for physical, manual, 'practical', 'hands on' work and this also was a key draw factor into the profession for a significant share of firefighters. Some had also detailed their struggles with formal education. This is also reflected in their backgrounds prior to joining the service. Most firefighters participating in this study came from a fitness/physical education, military-related or traditional trade background.

However, while the physically demanding nature of the job as well as the 'excitement' of emergency response were important sought after and favourable aspects of the job, there was concern around being able to



maintain adequate levels of physical fitness up until the elevated retirement age of 60 years. This may be seen to reflect how a challenge demand may tip into becoming a hindrance demand in the course of one's career. A firefighter of 39 years of age reflected on a recent incident:

*"...we were out constantly and carrying backpacks and walking for hours and really hot conditions and sometimes yet the pace kind of it can be quite- again, I'm fine now. I'm just wondering how much longer will I be able to do the job. It's something that is at the back of my mind." (F19)*

Roughly two thirds of respondents had concerns over whether they would be able to maintain operational fitness until the age of 60. Several respondents had also commented on the older age of new recruits to the service (FG1; FG2; F6). The advanced age profile of recruits in combination with the increase in the retirement age again furthered concern over safety at incidents regarding the decreasing level of professional knowledge based on experience within crews and physical fitness levels of older crew members (FG1; FG2; FG4; FG5; FG7; F4; F7; F6; F10; F15; F18; F19; F27; F30 F33; F39; F42). Concerns for their own safety as well as that of members of the public at incidents as an anticipated result of having crews containing older and therefore likely to be less physically fit firefighters were also expressed.

### 6.3. Job resources in firefighting and professional values: The significance and positive or negative experiences of material and non-material job rewards

#### 6.3.1. Extrinsic job resources in firefighting: Terms and conditions and job (status) security

##### *Professional values and pay and shift patterns as job resources in a reform context*

Remuneration in terms of pay levels associated with the job had not been a chief factor for the vast majority of FF respondents to join the profession. However, the perceived fairness of the effort-reward-bargain and connection of pay to notions of the perceived worth of the occupation elicited some dissatisfactions therewith. Perceptions of the adequacy or fairness of pay in the FRS case study depended heavily on work effort (in terms of the range of tasks undertaken or skills offered by FFs) and in symbolic terms as a token of recognition for the social value of tasks undertaken by FFs.

Irrespective of the comparison to prior pay in other occupations, however, there was a wide spread feeling that pay levels inadequately compensated for work effort in terms of the atypical working times, breadth of tasks carried out, skills possessed and occupational hazards faced by firefighters. There was near universal consensus that a role expansion as envisaged under the 'transformation programme' should be connected to an increase in pay (alongside the provision of additional training and adequate equipment), similar to the prior role expansion of 2002/03 and promise by employers and government of pay eventually being lifted to £30,000 in exchange for

professionalisation efforts. Although employers had accepted that FFs had taken on more tasks, the senior union respondent (F43), however, explained that efforts to negotiate a higher pay in exchange for further increases in tasks, such as OHCAs, had failed owing to a lack of diversification in effectively broadening the role of the firefighter, unlike paramedics whose professional training had expanded and now resulted in a degree equivalent qualification:

*“...they re-evaluated the role of the fire fighter and said ‘yep, you’ve taken on more, absolutely. [...] but it’s still all just in the same pot..’” (F43)*

The impact of austerity and either no pay rises or pay rises restricted to 1% per year were remarked upon across the vast majority of the firefighter sample. The issue of no or 1% pay rises under austerity had caused significant discontent. This had fostered a sense that FFs’ and the work carried out by them were undervalued, not appreciated, ‘not worth anything’ or ‘demoralised’ was expressed by more than half of frontline participants and (to some extent) acknowledged by several key respondents (SPM; HR). According to a firefighter:

*“...they’re always wanting more from you but no recompense for what you’re doing or for the value.”(F4)*

Just over a third of firefighter respondents pointed to a stagnation in wages or in effect a reduction in wages in real terms as a result of this. A couple of firefighters indicated to struggle financially or to know of colleagues working several jobs (F19; F36). Pressures on pay in the context of pay freezes or rises not taking account of inflation levels, the prior reforms to pensions and sector more broadly were a frequently cited reason for why participating FFs’ colleagues had left (FG2; FG5; FG6; FG7; F19).

As a consequence of dissatisfactions with pay raised in the above discussion, inevitably the quality of such a rise was also of importance to some respondents. During the fieldwork, a pay offer for the next 4 years was made to FFs for signing up to the enhanced FF role as part of the 'transformation programme'. This offer concerned a pay rise of 2% in the first two years and a not yet stipulated rise for the final two years. This was rejected by the FBU Scotland membership. Two groups of respondents further questioned the quality of the pay offer which was made for responding to Marauding Terrorist Firearms Attack. The view was that additional payment for extra duties ('specialist duties') needed to be in proportion and reasonable considering the nature of those additional duties. Two firefighter respondents jokingly pondered how many pence per bullet the non-pensionable £1,000 pay boost for the first year of responding to marauding terrorist firearms attacks would be (F24 and F27).

At the time of fieldwork, a harmonisation of the terms and conditions of the legacy brigades in relation to additional payments firefighters could receive (such as, for instance, allowances for specialist services, mileage or detached duty) was yet to be concluded. In the WSDA in which somewhat over half of the fieldwork took place, highest supplementary payments were awarded for specialist duties. Participants in FG2 and FG3 (who were present at that point during the focus group) in the ESDA voiced dissatisfaction that no harmonised agreement had been reached. These participants stated that receiving lower or no additional payments for the same job had negatively affected their morale. As F15 put it "*...the different people on different pay. That affects morale.*" This may reflect some degree of violation of a strong sense of professional cohesion among firefighters.

Aside of dissatisfactions with pay, a centrally positive aspect of work to FFs had largely remained (in spite of implementation issues), namely the shift pattern. Somewhat with the exception of 'orange days', the shift pattern was strongly favoured by the vast majority of FF respondents. Even though the

5GDS had been rolled out service-wide, the actual shift pattern had not changed much. About a third of respondents had indicated that the shift pattern was a draw factor into the profession. Several respondents highlighted that a benefit of the 5WDS was the 18 days of annual leave following seven rotations of two day shifts, two night shifts and four days off. The whole watch going on leave at the same time was also viewed favourably (F8; F9; F14; F17; F18; F23; F29; F31), in particular crew/watch managers indicated that this made arranging training easier. However, to those few with young families 'orange days' potentially represented a nuisance in having to arrange and pay for child care, whether one would be called in or not. The main issues relating to the 5WDS were a result of the new duty systems' requirement to be sufficiently staffed (or to be run at 'full establishment') but being, in effect, understaffed rather than the system exclusively *per se*. This concerned that swapping shifts had become harder. A firefighter explained how fewer bodies on a shift had complicated getting time off:

*"if you wanted time off outwith your shift pattern, it's harder to get [...]. Whereas cause there's always an extra few bodies on your shift on the other pattern" (F9)*

### *Professional values and experiences of job (status) security as a job resource in a reform context*

The perceived job security offered in becoming a firefighter was cited as a draw factor into the occupation by half of FF respondents. By and large in spite of the organisational restructuring, envisaged organisational 'transformation' programme and shift to a duty system requiring fewer members of staff (5GDS) the job was still perceived as offering such job security, if potentially only up until a certain age. A few FFs (F5; FG6; F36 F37; F35) expressed concerns surrounding potential station closures under

discussion by management, as a senior union key informant (F43) also confirmed senior management were discussing at the time. However, being aware of the widely noted understaffing and the retirement profile of the workforce, namely the proportion of staff approaching retirement age or due to retire, potential station closures did not pose a perceived risk of being made redundant to these firefighters. Rather, there was a wider concern about the availability of support and relief crews at incidents as well as potential increases in the time it would take for these to arrive on scene as detailed under Section 6.2.1. (FG1; FG4; FG5; FG6). This connected to a concern around the increase in potential harm this posed to FFs and members of the public.

Instead, the majority of FFs expressed concerns around the elevated retirement age and being made redundant 'on capability' (see also Section 6.2.2.). Over a third of FF participants pointed out that the Scottish Government, though unable to change the retirement age itself, had locally guaranteed that firefighters unable to maintain operational fitness up until the age of 60 years or those injured would not be made redundant 'on capability', but offered non-operational positions. Yet, these participants further questioned whether these assurances could indeed be honoured in the future for potential lack of office based vacancies, some predicting that guarantee to be withdrawn again in the future.

*"If there's 100s of people that are deemed to not be fit for- to be frontline they can't all just go into office jobs. It's not cap- it's not possible. So what'll happen is they'll to end up getting sacked on capability." (F10)*

Rather than job security having become eroded on the side of the organisation, there was a perception by over a third of FF participants that the pension reforms and other factors affecting terms and conditions, such as pay freezes, had made remaining less attractive and/or leaving the service easier thus more appealing for candidates viewing this less as a vocation and

career for life but more of a job to try out before moving on. Indeed, in the light of the previously detailed pension reforms, pay freezes and planned as well as past reorganisation, such as the further enlargement of FFs job roles to include response to OHCA+ and beyond without an associated offer for an increase in pay, to several frontline FF participants there was some sense of uncertainty surrounding potential future changes. This dissatisfaction was compounded where short notice of changes was given (FG1; FG4; FG5; F14; F29; F33), FFs' concerns brushed aside (FG7; F19; F39; F40; F41; F42) and frontline suggestions to iron out difficulties in implementation ignored (FG3; F20; F23). It was more the perception of not being able to trust there to be no further changes to the pension, a sense of betrayal in having agreed to certain conditions when joining for this to have been changed since, lack of trust in the intentions of (the Westminster) government, a threat to (and sense of deterioration in) the socially valued status of the occupation as 'heroes' 'life savers' as result of any task expansion which FFs felt less competent to perform, able to deliver a positive outcome on, or which have changed the relationship with service users, that had propelled a wider sense of job status insecurity and were connected to some negative attitudes towards work as a result. A firefighter reflected:

*"...management and lack of money have changed the goal post that many times. And we've had to take on extra duties... so much so [as had happened just four weeks ago] that you come back from your holidays and you've got extra stuff to do that you didn't do before" (F27)*

### 6.3.2. Social job resources in firefighting: Relational aspects of work and employment

#### *Professional values and collective interest representation as a resource at work: Trade unionism and collective bargaining arrangements*

Historically, unionisation among WT firefighters in the FBU had been very high and still was at the time of the fieldwork. All respondents that were available to answer the question on FBU membership indicated to be members of the union (i.e. this excludes F16, F21, F22 and F40). A few responded to the question with cynical comments such as *'Unfortunately, yes.'* (F35); *'Ask me how many times I've thought about leaving'* (F37); a couple more had indicated to have considered leaving (F11; F12) and one respondent had even left the FBU but re-joined later (F27). All respondents that were available to comment recounted the same story of how they became union members; being presented with various forms to sign on their first day such as signing up to the pension scheme, firefighters' lottery and a union membership form.

The cynical comments described above reflect the degree of dissatisfaction with the union that was expressed by about a quarter of respondents and a critical attitude towards the union was more widely held. But it was not solely the case study respondents who had borne the brunt of the pension reform after the strike of 2002/03 who reported feeling disillusioned. Some of those FFs with less service chimed in with a third of those with longer service in perceiving the union to be weak or incapable of effecting much change. Those with the longest amounts of service had argued the union was weakened as a result of the defeat in 2002/03 (F4; F14; F24; F27; F29; F33). Criticism also related to the membership fees which were pointed out as



being very costly in most conversations. In the light of pay freezes and a perceived ineffectiveness of the union, a firefighter elaborated:

*“we’ve not had a pay rise and it’s like a pay freeze and [...] I know of people who have come out of the union because they just want to save that little bit of money cause they might think ‘ohh I’m not benefitting in any way’” (F13)*

However, in spite of widespread criticism, there was also acknowledgement by a third of respondents that a lot of what the union does would go on *‘behind the scenes’* (F4) and that the FBU likely had sometimes prevented the worst from happening. The benefits firefighters indicated to gain from union membership concerned individual protection in terms of, for instance, legal support, enhanced sick pay or keeping management or the government somewhat in check. The union was described as an *‘insurance’* by some.

Although the substantive terms and conditions were negotiated at UK-level, as was previously indicated, collective bargaining arrangements allowed for some elements to be decided at local (Scottish) level. Senior key informants HR and F43 both agreed that industrial relations were more amicable and productive in Scotland, also in view of perceptions of the Scottish Government’s different attitude to trade unionism compared to its Westminster counterpart. This benefitted FFs in so far as the more sympathetic towards its public service workforce Scottish Government was able to intervene to some extent, such as in guaranteeing FFs would not be made redundant on *‘capability’* after the age of 55 years in the light of the increase of the pension age to 60 years (F37).

*Professional values and experiences of management and work teams as job resources*

The size of work teams for frontline FFs is determined by the so called Target Operating Model (TOM) stipulating staffing levels across the service. Under the so called Resource Based Crewing model as negotiated with the FBU, the first or sole 'pumping' appliance is required to be crewed by five FFs, the second 'pumping' appliance by four FFs and additional specialist appliances attract variation in crewing requirements depending on their type. 'Height' appliances are stipulated to be staffed by two firefighters and other specialist appliances are to be crewed by moving two FFs off the 'first pumping appliance'. These requirements in effect determine the size of FFs' work teams, namely a watch size of nine FFs (plus any 'bodies' for specialist appliances) in 'two pump' stations or five FFs (plus any 'bodies' for specialist appliances) in 'single pump' stations. Previously, in addition to these primary crewing levels (some) watches comprised 'extra bodies' to cover for sickness absence which under the 5GDS were largely replaced with 'orange days', except in some remoter WT stations. Line management (crew and watch managers) form part of these frontline crews.

Aside, however, of the removal of 'extra bodies' and some reshuffling of FFs to form the fifth watch (F7), teams, their working arrangements and their sizes had largely remained intact. As a result of the, according to some respondents, high prevalence of FFs on so called 'out-duty' (or 'detached duty' as respondents themselves referred to it) alongside FFs coming in on a 'head-for-head' where these had swapped shifts with a colleague, there was some element of fluctuation in immediate day to day work teams. However, no widespread implications on a sense of team or social cohesion could be noted. Being despatched to different stations to cover for staff shortages appeared an informal communication channel (perhaps even one more efficient than those employed by the organisation) on how news travelled or

as F15 put it “...so it’s when anything happens, the jungle drums beat, you know, and people find out. So word travels quite quickly.”

The training arrangements which initially take place within a training college and thereafter continuously within watches built and reinforced a strong sense of social cohesion and even seeing enduring friendships forged. Indeed, to a very large proportion of participants, teamwork was a very important aspect of their work, in providing ‘camaraderie’, ‘working with like-minded people’, ‘friends at work’ or even outwith work as some participants explained to also enjoy privately socialising with colleagues (FG1; FG4; F2; F6; F7; F8; F9; F10; F15; F18; F19; F20; F23; F29; F33; F42). Social relations with their work teams were cited as an important coping mechanism for dealing with negative parts of the job in terms of support available at and after incidents, such as talking about incidents on return to the station as well as sharing jokes. In regard to support at incidents, a firefighter emphasised the importance of harmonious collegial relations, to which another joked:

*F11:*

*I think the kinda camaraderie in the watch is a, is a big thing.*

*F13:*

*-having... yeah, your colleagues with you who have got varying- the same knowledge of no knowledge*

The centrality of good social relations with their team members to FFs may further be necessitated by the nature of such emergency work. Being able to rely on colleagues may gain enhanced significance in the light of the potentially life threatening environments in which FFs operate at incidents.

When prompted to evaluate whether changes in the participants’ work place had led to changes in their enthusiasm for their work, some firefighters cited working within their teams as making their work still enjoyable in spite of what they saw as varying degrees of negative changes therein (FG1; FG4; F8; F15; F18; F19; F20; F23; F33).

Line managers formed part of these tightly knit work teams and social relations with them were very supportive. To each crew there was a 'crew manager' as the immediate line manager and a 'watch manager' as the next tier of line management at 'single pump' stations or one watch manager for two crews (plus crews on specialist appliances) at 'two pump' stations. The sense of social cohesion between FFs and line managers, for instance, was evident in crews, including variably watch and crew managers, taking turns in preparing meals (FG1; FG4; FG6; F8) as well as taking turns in buying cake or sweets (FG5). A few FFs felt sympathy for line (and station) managers who had seen significant increases in their workloads, were held responsible and criticised for things as small as a minor administrative error committed by one of their crew or missed targets for HFSVs (F7; F10; F17; F25; F31; F36). Line managers in turn were very dedicated to their crews. The manners in which most of these discussed their relations with their crews showed that these felt protective over the FFs they were responsible for as well as concern for their wellbeing, both in terms of safety at incidents as well as in the station (F8; F11; F14; F20; F23; F24; F29; F33). Examples included making sure their crews were '*fed and watered*' (F8), feeling angered if mid management and/or back office staff were perceived as mistreating them for small mistakes (F24), feeling protective over the quality of their jobs, such as financial rewards available to them or access to training and time off (F20, F23, F29, F33), or safety at incidents (F11, F14, F20, F23, F24, F34).

These positive, supportive social relations with the more immediate managers were in contrast to those in tiers of management beyond that who were seen to have breached the sense of social cohesion of members within the occupation and mutually supportive relations for self-interested agendas.

Management seen as driven by ulterior motives in advancing their own careers and self-interested gains, such as fancy company cars, were negatively remarked upon (FG2; FG4; FG5; FG6; FG7, F7) FFs. A group felt particularly offended by what they perceived as very public displays of management's self-interest, as a firefighter detailed:

*"...times have been hard over the last so many years with austerity and any major fire you've been to [...] at the back of all the fire engines is half a dozen luxury cars parked with wee blue lights on top! It doesnae look very good to the public." (F17)*

As far as supportive relations with managers above line management are concerned, these appeared to have become eroded and were prior to the latest set of reforms perceived as having been more positive (or less negative at the least) (FG2; FG3; FG4; FG5; FG6; FG7) (as Section 6.2.2. discussed).

However, some elements of wider organisational support could be seen as positive. Several accounts of bullying were perceived to have been positively responded to by mid- and back office management within the organisation. The effort undertaken to protect and resolve incidents of workplace bullying was very positively perceived by the few affected FFs. There was also a wider awareness of counselling offered by the organisation to those who needed it (F6; F7; F10; FG1; HR).

*"Yeah, we have a counselling service [...] And anybody can self-refer or be referred and that's open tae everybody. [...] I've utilised it myself [twice]." (F6)*

Moreover, although frontline FFs felt largely unsupported and underappreciated by management beyond the more immediate station level, the organisation recognised the need for managerial support in connection to some of the proposed expansions of tasks under the organisational transformation programme. In the light of the increased psychosocial

demands posed by more frequent exposure to fatalities at OHCA's, at those stations where this was trialled it was stipulated that Station Managers would attend incidents to support crews in taking care of grieving relatives. Indeed, one of the station managers who facilitated access to several crews was called out to attend an OHCA incident with a crew during a field visit to a fire station.

*Professional values and experiences of prosocial job characteristics as job resources: Task significance and contact with beneficiaries or the public*

Prior to joining the profession, the occupation had generally strongly been perceived as offering task significance in the positive impact the job would allow incumbents to have on individuals and communities at large across the sample. Around two thirds of firefighter participants had indicated that seeking a job in which they felt they would have 'the ability to help other people' and which was perceived to offer 'feeling a sense of achievement from [their] work' were highly significant draw factors into the profession as well as 'to have a positive impact on society/communities'. The centrality of seeking work that was seen as consistent with prosocial values in terms of 'helping people' was conveyed in most conversations. Just over a quarter of participants indicated to have felt 'a calling' into the occupation. A few participants explained that the perceived task significance offered by the occupation had meant that this was considered a 'vocation' (F19; F27; SPM), something a few individuals felt drawn towards because of their strong identification with prosocial values at the sacrifice of pay (but not pensions or job security). A key informant reflected:

*"The fire service historically has been vocational. So like any vocation people want to get into it in general to help people, to help society, to be a good person." (SPM)*

FF participants detailed the ways in which they were 'helping people' in terms of core fire and rescue activities, including specialist services, what they saw as incidents of a perhaps more random nature (such as assisting the ambulance to recover the corpses of those who had committed suicide; stuck pets, lifts and teenagers on, for instance, playgrounds; moving bariatric patients) but also prevention-driven community engagement activities, such as gala days or HFSVs. Several participants had a much wider perspective on the scope in and breadth of ways in which FFs were able to impart a positive effect on others and communities, or as one watch manager put it "*we're [...] the whole kinda social care package in one*" (F24).

Relations with beneficiaries, the public or 'people' were an important aspect of work to most FF respondents, also in offering gratitude, appreciation and recognition. The (enhanced) social status of the occupation (in terms of the 'reputation of the fire service and profession') in this being perceived as a '*cool job*' (F10), '*well respected*' or '*special*' (F6; F10; F15; F21; F43), and as enjoying a good reputation (F18; F38; F40), associated with what some indicated as being 'gendered preferences' (F35; F36; F2; F11; F12; 13), and the job's social significance in 'saving lives', were drawn factors into the profession to around a third of participating FFs and to some recognition of this social status related to feelings of pride, such as "*I wanted to do something that I could maybe take a bit more pride in*" (F25). Several participants primarily gave examples of feeling a sense of achievement from work and when they had felt that they had helped someone or made a difference to others in relation to incident response. To these FFs, this perhaps illustrates the more directly visible impact on beneficiaries (and social status) emergency response provides in relation to experiencing task significance. As a firefighter described "*If you've made a rescue, that gives you a sense of achievement*" (F5).

Recognition and gratitude for help rendered as well as knowledge of the positive impact FFs' work had on individuals and their communities was

connected to feeling a sense of achievement from work and experiencing work as psychologically rewarding. Examples of satisfying experiences of work centred more so, though not exclusively, on instances in which FFs had knowledge of having had a positive influence, including in terms of having prevented a worse outcome at an incident and not being busy responding to fires as this was seen as the positive outcome of their preventive work, and particularly in which beneficiaries expressed gratitude, appreciation or admiration, such as pupils' *'faces lighting up'* at visits to schools (F10). An illustration is a firefighter's comments on recipients of HFSVs:

*"They're usually quite grateful, you know, so it's just a pest sometimes cause you end up trailing half way across the city to fit one smoke detector" (F41)*

These relations with beneficiaries and the wider public (and, relatedly, which underpinned a sense of task significance) were to some extent altered in the light of changing tasks and incidents firefighters attended. While firefighter participants mostly reasoned that the bases of experiencing task significance in their jobs had shifted in line with changes in tasks undertaken but not necessarily (fully) diminished, this still Beneficiaries or members of the public more broadly, as well as sources of recognition, admiration and gratitude, can be a source of scrutiny, for instance, of conduct at incidents or in making judgements about FFs' 'lazy' work ethic (FG4; FG1; FG6; F15; F19). As the previous discussion has highlighted, the social status of the profession in relation to the significance of the purpose it serves, not only as 'heroes' and 'life savers' but generally for the humanitarian work carried out by the occupation were important aspects of their work to firefighters.

Changes in the relationship and dynamics with beneficiaries or members of the public shifting away from being appreciated helpers in emergencies to not being able to provide help and feeling unwanted, as described under Section 6.2.2., to some seemed to diminish the sense of doing rewarding work most firefighter participants otherwise indicated to obtain. A significant proportion



of FFs indicated that attitudes towards them had appeared to have become more negative affecting their sense of task significance in that the value of the positive impact of the wide ranging activities carried out by them was brought into question.

At the core of the increasing push for productivity, as described earlier, to some FFs in busy urban stations there seemed to be a wider public perception judging FFs as lazy and not having to work much other than turning out to the occasional emergency (FG1; FG2; FG4; FG6; F15; F19). It was felt that this was ignorant of all their wider non-emergency work, such as training to maintain their skills, community engagement and preventative work. This resonated with the wider held feeling of being undervalued, in particular for the wider work done beyond emergency work not only by management, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, but also to some extent the wider public.

*“Some people complain about what we do or what we don’t do but they don’t complain when they really need us, i.e. when something’s on fire or you know. But they’re quick to say that we don’t do anything, really, we’re lazy and we’re not- some people say we’re not worth..... anything.” (F38)*

A firefighter also speculated that negative public opinion was utilised to drive through change *“I feel they don’t want the public to like us because then the public values [us] which means it costs money there for them. [...] then they’ve got no stick to beat us with.”* (F37). This view was shared by the union respondent (F43) who thought that governments like to manipulate public opinion of public services in line with their own agendas, such as for instance cuts and reforms. With the under austerity enhanced pressure to ‘justify’ the budget spent on the service, this implied a challenge to firefighter’s standing as valued ‘heroes’/‘life savers’ and more traditional bases for experiencing task significance. The higher unlikelihood of being able to deliver a positive outcome at OHAC incidents further arguably to

some degree had similar effects (FG1; FG4; FG6; F10; F19; F26; SPM) (Section 6.2.2.).

Therefore, while opportunities for firefighters to observe the significance of the impact of their actions on beneficiaries may have decreased in terms of occasions on which the scope and magnitude of these would be particularly pronounced (in the same vein as beneficiary expressions of gratitude), such as through rescues, firefighters could still gain a sense of task significance from expansion into tasks which they reasoned still imparted a positive, if less visible, impact on beneficiaries and the public at large. Task significance as a job resource in firefighting to this extent then seemed able to mitigate some of the negative psychosocial demands associated with shifts in firefighters' job roles posed by the last two consecutive waves of public sector reform. However, task expansion into areas in which there was a smaller chance of imparting a positive effect on others ('helping'; e.g. OHCAs) and more critical or even negative public views of firefighters appear to somewhat have contributed to a degree of erosion in perceived task significance firefighters had previously associated with their jobs.

### 6.3.3. Intrinsic job resources in firefighting: Training and autonomy

#### *Professional values and training as a job resource: Competence and normalising extreme demands*

The significance of training as a job resource to firefighters lies in it functioning as a mechanism normalising the extreme demands of working in highly hazardous and physically challenging environments and as a psychological coping mechanism in the reassurance provided by gaining and maintaining 'competence'. Training in the traditional drills-based exercises

emulates the experience of working on the job. This enables firefighters to normalise the extreme demands associated with emergency response. This is encapsulated in fully qualified firefighters being referred to as 'competent' and the belief that competence is central to staying safe. While the importance attached to training might also be in part explained by preferences for manual, physical work as detailed earlier, its significance in normalising extreme demands to some extent explains the substantial negative discussion changes in learning arrangements had triggered. There was widespread agreement that training provisions at the time of fieldwork in terms of quality, mode of delivery and frequency were not of sufficient standard. Concerns about (amongst other factors) adequate training provisions were echoed by a senior union official who pointed to an increase in firefighter injuries and near deaths (F43). A firefighter reflected on the outcomes of current training provisions:

*"it certainly made basic things like drills, it made them automatic, you didn't even have to think about, you knew them exactly. Nowadays when we go out there you're like 'alrite...', you know, I have to focus and switch on" (F17)*

In normalising extreme job demands, training and maintaining 'competence' could be argued to foster a sense of feeling well equipped to do the job. The belief to have done all that they could or to the best of their ability in the light of negative outcomes at incidents was conveyed to provide reassurance to several FFs (F10; F19; F20; F23; F26) arguably mitigating the negative emotional demands of being confronted with casualties. F10 who spoke about his experience of fatalities at incidents explained *"...if there was something that you felt you could have done better at then I would struggle with that"* (F10).

Contrary to this, as prior discussion has highlighted, situations in which participants felt ill-equipped to help, offer interventions or resolve an incident were described as associated with additional or novel psychosocial

demands, such as feeling outwith one's 'comfort zone', uncomfortable, 'a totally different stress', a moral pressure or frustrating (FG1; FG5; FG4 F26 F34 F25; FG6; F19; SPM; HR). This also played a key part in attitudes towards the expansion of the role of the firefighter into other areas, such as emergency medical response to out of hospital cardiac arrests (OHCA). This role expansion was driven by the belief that because FFs had received initial training in dealing with casualties at other incidents, they already possessed the skills required. While a few respondents indicated that using AEDs was technically simple, it was agreed that more and better training was needed to respond to, for instance, OHCA's, not least to be somewhat better prepared for other eventualities that may be mistaken for or present instead of OHCA's. This highlights the central importance of training in the light of extreme demands and as a coping mechanism with emotional demands.

In this vein, training further appeared to reinforce other job resources. Feeling well equipped to do the job also could be considered crucial for firefighters' ability 'to help people' or 'save lives' therefore underpinning aspects of task significance. Instances in which firefighters had not been able to provide a level of help in line with their desire 'to help people' or 'save lives' owing to lack of training, equipment or experience or had predicted for that ability to help to become potentially constrained in the future triggered negative discussion. As one firefighter detailed his experiences of attending at what upon arrival became evident was a stroke:

*"... You've got that demand from somebody's family member sitting there while that person's suffering whatever they're going through and there's nothing we can do" (F26)*

In addition to mitigating or coping with the demands posed by the job, training arrangements as a job resource boosted other characteristics of work resonating with professional values in terms of preferred knowledge formation systems whereby experience and therefore understanding of the

job underpins authority and social cohesion (including fostering strong occupational identities) underpinning team working.

One of the key issues for respondents pertained to an increasing computerisation of training, alongside financially-driven cuts to more hands-on training. Computerised training represents a challenge to the learning practices accepted by the profession in which professional knowledge based on experience is considered the basis of authority and accepted seniority. The significance attached to experience can be illustrated at the example of a few participants in promoted positions citing this as a reason for wanting to progress up the ranks. A watch manager detailed:

*“situations arose that we were getting younger firefighters coming in that were then going in charge of us and telling us what to do that didn’t have the experience and maybe had a bad attitude because they thought, they did know what they were doing and wouldn’t take advice of... myself or other people.” (F8)*

Computerised training thus represents a challenge to training as a job resource. It is contrary to preferred (and accepted) ways of learning through real life practice; either through first-hand experience at incidents or simulating such conditions during ‘drills’. A crew manager, alongside his watch manager now expected to train himself on a computer to cascade this further down, voiced his frustrations:

*“Yeah that’s how we’re expected to train people now, on a computer [...] You can’t ask a computer a question– if it’s not that clear, what do you do? [...] and most of it, it’s just stills. There’s very few videos.” (F23)*

But not only had reforms shaped the delivery of training, the impact of austerity on training was also felt in direct cuts to training provisions. A cost-saving element was evident in stopping parts of training that were delivered by an external agency. Instead, this was to be cascaded down from crew

and/or watch managers. This related to the so called First Person On Scene (or FPOS) training which provided basic emergency medical skills and was replaced with ICAT (Initial Casualty Assessment Training). Guidance for watch/crew managers on how to cascade such training down was reportedly minimal and, to a few, a reflection of the understaffing in support functions such as the department responsible for delivering training. The importance of being trained by professionals, within or outwith the firefighter occupation, as those possessing the adequate experience and knowledge is illustrated in the following remarks:

*“now we are turning out to things like this [OHCA] so it is even more imperative that we get trained properly by medical professions not our crew commander that has just as much first aid experience as I do”  
(F10)*

These changes again resonated with a challenge to the accepted professional learning systems. Part of the resentment to these changes was the view that specialist training should be provided by experts (professionals) instead of crew/watch managers who themselves often knew less about basic emergency medical care than the most recently recruited members of their crews. While the cascading down of experience-based knowledge by longer serving crew members (i.e. 'experts') was considered crucial, giving watch/crew managers a day's worth of training to then pass this on to firefighters was rejected by most participants as insufficient, including by watch/crew managers themselves.

Moreover, the view that on-screen computer learning was deemed insufficient for being equipped to deal with incidents not only related to the 'practical' element deemed a vital part of training. Computer-based learning also increasingly individualised a previously almost exclusively group-based activity.

Learning in such a way not only reduced opportunities to learn from the experience of others, it also could be argued to have reduced time spent bonding as a team. An example of this social element of training is:

*“When I can learn something really well and talk about it really well to a member of the watch, whether that be in a presentation or training then I feel great.” (F7)*

The scope of training as a job resource in firefighting appeared further undermined by the view that computer-based training was more of a managerial tool than genuine training system. This example offers an illustration of the intertwined effects of reform measures seeing spending cuts, enhanced psychosocial demands posed by the proliferation of managerialism and their inter-dynamic effects in decreasing characteristics of work which had previously been organised according to professional values. A firefighter voiced his suspicions:

*“...it’s all on the computer, we tick the box, you’re done. That’s you trained. So if something goes wrong, ‘Hang on a minute, you’ve ticked the box to say you were competent and that you’ve done the training’” (F17)*

Despite wide consensus on inadequate training quality, delivery (including methods), and frequency, there seemed, at the time of fieldwork, to be no major concern among firefighters in terms of feeling less capable to do the job. However, it was believed that in the future this might become an issue. Once the more experienced team members would have retired and newer recruits made up the main part of crews, who had neither been able to learn from experience at incidents nor received adequate training, this was expected to become more pressing.

### *Professional values and experiences of autonomy as a job resource*

As was noted under several previous sections throughout this chapter, a myriad of procedures determined work processes at incidents. However, autonomy under the 'command and control' model of incident response rested with line management in so far as to evaluate how to deploy crews and equipment in compliance with procedures, in the safest possible manner to crews and the public while at the same time effectively containing or mitigating the hazards posed by fire or other rescue ('specialist services') incidents.

Watch managers would make decisions on how to deploy the crews of up to two pumping appliances (and specialist appliances), whereas crew managers would make such decisions for FFs manning one appliance. Several crews discussed how less appliances on the run could potentially intensify stress at incidents when support crews needed for application of safety procedures would have to be despatched from further away stations owing to a lack of available fire engines nearer by (FG1; FG4; FG5; FG6). The crew/watch managers pointed to the significant amount of responsibility this entailed.

Having such responsibility to decide on how to deploy crews and fire engines while finding this constrained by waiting on assistance needed for staying safe(r) alongside an expectant public observing the scene were seen as negative pressures. A crew manager discussed:

*"if you got a house fire [...] the guys who are there first are put under a lot of strain and a lot of pressure- [...] for instance, at multi-storey flats now you need tae wait on other appliances coming to help you and you get put under a lot a moral pressure-" (F11)*

Similarly, FFs arguably had autonomy in deciding how to treat casualties encountered upon 'effecting entry' prior to the arrival of ambulance crews and



in the absence of procedures as casualty care as a result of, for instance, slips, trips and falls at that point had not formed part of the official firefighter role map. Having the training, knowledge and experience on how or what care to give (namely to decide the methods of work) as well as equipment was seen as a critical issue (FG1; FG3; FG4; FG5; FG6; FG7; F6; F7; F15, F18). This also applied to instructions to carry out a task without knowing in effect how to do so (F24), such as what should be communicated at 'reassurance visits', or improvising to solve problems outwith their jobs, such as stuck lifts (FG5). Moreover, FG6 discussed examples of being willing to use their discretion to help resolve incidents and improvise. However, autonomy was then again viewed as unfavourable if in the end decisions made based on having exerted this would be brought into question or sanctioned unfairly by more senior management (FG6; F17). Arguably then, at incidents, in the context of strict procedures autonomy had negative effects where exerting this was seen to open up the potential to suffer adverse consequences, such as a disciplinary (FG6). A watch manager discussed:

*"There's a bit of a grey area where they can do that. But see if it goes wrong, it's them that get it. They get- they'll get chastised for it"*  
(F14)

As was noted earlier, some FF respondents discussed how those elements of autonomy that had rested within the profession or with those adequately qualified and understanding of operational frontline work had decreased. This had led to objections to such work practices, also in terms of safety concerns. The senior union respondent (F43) as well as some FFs also expressed concern over current procedures becoming 'unworkable' (with a drop in the speed of response anticipated) under reduced staffing models as were under discussion at the time of study as well as in the light of pumps having to go off the run due to understaffing and further cuts under austerity with potential implications for crew safety (FG1; FG6 F35; FG3 F23; FG4; FG5 F32 & F30). While a significant of proportion of staff in policy formulating roles still had entered the service as firefighters themselves, these had been promoted

beyond gaining much (line managerial) experience of working at the frontline and other staff in back office functions had increasingly come entirely from a civilian background. A watch manager detailed:

*“People that are above their self in this job, people that forget where they came fe in this job trying to chastise you basically and try to belittle you” (F24)*

A of respondents found that smaller pockets of autonomy, such as organising staffing or scheduling activities for the day, improvising at incidents or involvement in decision making had been removed from the frontline (FG4; FG7 F19; FG3; F14; FG5 F29 F33; FG2; FG6). A group of firefighters deliberated how they felt ‘orange days’ had eroded feelings of some degree of autonomy over working times and time off (FG7).

The negative effects on morale, as well as lack of involvement of frontline FFs in decision making despite a desire to be included, were acknowledged by key informants HR and SPM. Wanting to gain such increased responsibility and the ability to make decisions was by a couple of participants cited as a reason for why they had opted to ‘go for promotion’ (SPM; F8).

## 6.4. Positive or negative individual job outcomes: Experiences of the professional values and JD-R dynamic for firefighters

Several individual outcomes of job demands and resources in firefighting in the context of public sector reform could be noted. These included reports of increasing numbers of FFs leaving their jobs before retirement age, the

perception that being a firefighter was no longer a career for life, that morale had starkly dropped, but also that the occupation was still seen as a good job or at least better than available alternatives, even if some of its favourable job characteristics had deteriorated, others had remained.

### *Positive individual job outcomes of the JD-R and professional values dynamic: Job satisfaction*

Although consecutive waves of public sector reform had changed FFs' characteristics of work and employment, the vast majority of FF participants still viewed theirs a decent or 'good job', if yet to most a 'different job' in the extent of how much it had changed over the years or, to some of those with a shorter length of service, different to their expectations prior to entering the occupation. A few participants argued that, in spite of the changes to the job role, either they considered themselves lucky (F10) or their peers should consider themselves grateful to be in their jobs pointing to high levels of applicants seen as willing to do the job and new tasks required as part of it each time recruitment for new trainees opened up (FG2 F15 F17 F18; F20 F23).

However, several FF respondents who had joined more recently commented on differences in their expectations of the job as opposed to the realities of working on the job (F7; F13; F26; F32). More widely, it was suggested that while probably less fire and rescue incidents implied that the public was overall safer, this also was seen as connected to less opportunities for experiencing the job as psychologically rewarding (see Sections 6.2.2. and 6.3.2.). A few participants reflecting on the discrepancy between perceptions of what working in the job was like as opposed to the realities thereof speculated that there was intentional emphasis on the exciting, 'glamorous' (F33), aspects of the job in promoting this for recruitment purposes:

*It still has its moments. You get the occasional excitement parts, but 90% is pretty boring. (F30)*

As was argued under Sections 6.2.2. and 6.3.2., opportunities in work for experiencing job satisfaction, the work as rewarding and as intrinsically meaningful had declined in frequency or shifted. Particularly relevant here was the satisfaction of prosocial motives, but preferably in a manner in which a positive relation with beneficiaries and the public was maintained. A firefighter who had joined a few years prior to the fieldwork reflected on whether his experience of working on the job matched his reasons for joining the occupation:

*“Most probably not as much as I would have hoped. There are some instances where it’s fulfilled my... desire to help folk such as I’ve had instances [...] where I’ve saved lives.” (F7)*

### *Negative individual job outcomes of the JD-R and professional values dynamic: Morale, sickness absence and intentions to leave*

As was noted under Section 6.3.1., several firefighters described pay as a trade-off they had made for good terms and conditions in other areas, such as the pension and shift pattern, which had historically compensated for the lower rate of pay. While in the light of prior pension reforms, the sense of betrayal surrounding these and pay freezes, the overall squeeze on FFs’ terms and conditions in combination with a general feeling of being undervalued or underappreciated (in terms of pay, rhetoric and threats of cuts, management and the public) was believed to have contributed to morale being ‘at rock bottom’ (FG2; FG3; FG4; FG5; FG6; FG7; F8; F43; SPM). Overall, however, most FFs still expressed feeling enthusiastic to come into work, to not have ‘dreaded’ coming in to work or saw a decline in enthusiasm toward work as related to their career stage rather than resulting from any aspects of and changes in their jobs.

However, even though opportunities to satisfy prosocial motives and alongside FFs' terms and conditions of employment were seen as having declined or at the least had changed, these favourable aspects of FFs' jobs had not declined so much as to have entirely eroded and were still seen as favourable, in particular in comparison to what more than a third of FF respondents perceived other jobs offered. In spite of the significant dissatisfactions and frustrations most FF respondents had expressed in regard to some aspects of their jobs and changes therein over consecutive waves of reform, the vast majority expressed still overall to see theirs as a good job, having a love for or satisfaction with their jobs. changes in the characteristics of contact with beneficiaries or the wider public, such as in terms of 'being unwanted' or critically watched as unable to help, a lack of praise and positive feedback from management, had overall arguably challenged and undermined most firefighters respondents' understanding of their socially valued status as wanted helpers, heroes and life savers or recognition of the social value of the humanitarian work done. Feeling underappreciated and/or undervalued in particular by management (outwith station level) and to a much lesser extent members of the public was a sentiment expressed by around half of FF participants. Two KIs expressed awareness of this sentiment. As such, the central sources of dissatisfaction were psychosocial. These negative aspects of work largely were reported as being mitigated by station-level workplace relations (the 'camaraderie'), overall a favourable shift pattern also in regard to enjoying a work-life-balance, still essentially helping people, and (to some) the pay/pension still being ok, if simply not as good. A firefighter explained:

*"...it's a great job, I love doon the job and it's great you do feel achievement when you help somebody out of a building or anything you've been tae. [...]But it's changing cause everything's getting harder now, the conditions and stuff of your work. But I still enjoy the job." (F5)*

Sickness absence was a widely noted issue, yet it would appear not necessarily for work-related reasons in the first instance. The physically

active nature of the job appealing to those leading similar lifestyles was cited as a favourable aspect of work as a FF. Consequently, several respondents pointed out that this made FFs more prone to or had experienced sports related injuries themselves (F18; F31).

Organisational figures on internal referrals to the health and wellbeing services for the time of fieldwork show muscoskeletal injuries as the most frequently cited reason for such referrals at 42-46%, whereas stress and mental health related referrals accounted for 29% of all referrals made (SFRS, 2017b, pp. 33–34, 2019, pp. 34–36). Approximately just over 1 out of 10 employees received an internal referral, of which WT staff were referred most frequently (SFRS, 2019, p. 34). Of referrals made for stress-related reasons, the distribution between work-related and non-work-related reasons was almost equal (43% compared to 46%), whereas only 2% of referrals cited mental health as a reason (SFRS, 2019, p. 34). According to union official (F6), however, stress and mental health issues were far more endemic than these figures would suggest, if yet similarly divided into work- or non-work related proportions. The official also speculated that mental health issues as well as work-related stress likely were underreported. In the light of the overall ‘don’t complain’ work culture supported by findings from the conversations held with firefighters and dismissal of those seen as ‘moaners’ or ‘moaning’ by several FF participants (and confirmed by SPM, HR and in the cultural audit) would go some way to support this likely underreporting. Two participants had reported to have utilised counselling services offered by the organisation (F6; F7), of which one indicated to have done so for non-work related reasons and the other for a combination of work- and non-work-related reasons. It was anticipated that increased exposure to casualties as a result of the widened role of FFs, such as response to OHCA, could potentially see an increase in mental health issues as a result of increasing psychosocial demands by the HR key informant.

A firefighter also expected to potentially struggle with being exposed to fatalities more frequently as a result of OHCA response:

*“It’s a lot more positives [than negatives], yeah. If you asked me this once we do this, the defibrillator, and I see lots of dead people then I will probably be changing” (F19)*

The effects of the previously described dissatisfactions with various changes in and aspects of FFs’ jobs, such as squeeze on pay and pension reforms, were also argued to be evident in increasing numbers of firefighters leaving the service which previously *“was totally unheard of”* (F6). Not being tied into a non-portable pension scheme and more attractive terms and conditions in the private sector were quoted among the key incentives for firefighters to have left the service (F6; FG2; F19; FG5; FG7; F4). The majority of FF respondents had stories of colleagues that had left to pursue employment elsewhere. The bulk of those accounts referred to those firefighters who had picked up a trade before joining the service returning to this original trade, such as electricians or plumbers. In most cases, financial incentives were cited as the key driver, also indicating that pay was much better in those trades. A firefighter commented:

*“People are looking at ‘I’ve got to stay and work until I’m 60. Our pension’s good but it’s not as good as he’s getting. I should better go back to my old job.’”(F17)*

The trend of increasing numbers in those leaving the service is also reflective of the transformation of the traditional career-based model. The civilianisation of business support functions and increasingly fast-paced promotion progression systems further seem to provide evidence of this transformation. The notion that firefighting was moving away from being a career for life was widely accepted by KIs and FFs alike. Several key informants, however, tended to acknowledge this in discussing the change in more positive terms, such as in terms of skills that could be taken elsewhere, ‘carrying on working

beyond retirement age elsewhere because one hasn't felt ready yet' or 'seeking out new opportunities'.

*"There is a range of skills that people can take away from this job and use either outside on their days off or when they retire" (AM)*

Participating frontline firefighters, on the contrary, discussed the belief that it had come not to be a career for life anymore in more negative terms, some implying they considered this was intentional. It was believed that as part of driving down costs associated with staff this had resulted in an erosion of terms and conditions under which lifelong employment in the service had become unattractive or impossible and thus soon to be a thing of the past (FG2; FG1; F6; FG4; FG5; FG7; F4; F19).

However, apart from two participants questioning whether they could see themselves stay longer term in the light of proposed job role changes (F13) or job demands (F19), no firefighter respondent expressed to potentially consider leaving the service. Of those respondents more (significantly) dissatisfied with certain aspects of the job (F4; F7; F13; F16; F15; F19; F24; F25; F26; F27; F28; F29; F30; F32; F33; F34; F39; F41; F42), a few were counting down to close retirement, whereas several more had served enough time to consider themselves too tied to the job and pension, and a further few more expressed not being 'dissatisfied enough' to make leaving an attractive option as well as having experienced significantly worse terms and conditions in previous jobs.

A few FFs pondered whether they thought the job was still worth joining (F29; F33; F24; F27), mostly in regard to the pension and financial rewards available as well as treatment by management, or whether they would join again considering the job as being less "full on" in terms of response to fire and rescue related incidents (F20). There, however, was a widely reported disconnect between expectations of the job upon joining and the realities of working on it day to day, even among more recent recruits (including a few



with experience as retained FFs). A firefighter pondered to potentially leave once OHCA+ would have been properly brought in.

*“I don’t mind going into a fire and bringing casualties out but I’m- I personally, I don’t want to be a paramedic, so... [...] if it does evolve into us being first responders, is that something I want to do? That’s certainly not what I joined the fire service for “(F13)*

However, overall even those FF respondents who were the most critical of changes to their jobs and the sector, the vast majority of FFs still overall looked forward to going in to work or never having dreaded going in, felt attached to their jobs and enjoyment therein.

## 6.5. Chapter conclusion

This chapter was organised following the hierarchical structure of the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 4 , covering the reform context, job demands and resources in the context of professional values, to arrive at individual outcomes. The chapter discussed how structural reforms to the Scottish Fire and Rescue sector, a cold fiscal climate and associated quantitative adjustments had altered job demands and resources in firefighting. While increased quantitative demands in firefighting were noted as a cumulative result of reforms, firefighter participants most starkly negatively reported increases in qualitative job demands which were in several ways associated with the nature of these changes in relation to professional values. Job resources in firefighting in the context of public sector reform under austerity further were reported to have come under strain, such as a decline in the extent to which training arrangements presented a job resource and sense of task significance. Quantitative adjustments under austerity had directly seen a decline in extrinsic job resources, while the influence on other professional job resources, with the exception of training, remained more subtle. While reportedly there was an increasing demoralisation and number of firefighters leaving the profession, still some positive individual outcomes could be noted, such as the job still being seen as overall a good job in spite of a decline in previously more favourable working conditions.

## *Chapter 7. Further Education Colleges in Scotland*

This chapter presents the findings from the Further Education Colleges in Scotland case study. It synthesises the sources detailed in Chapter 5, comprising primary data, the analysis of which has been informed by documentary sources (see Section 5.3.2.). The chapter is organised into three substantive parts following the structure of the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 4. Therefore, this chapter first considers the public sector reform context of FE colleges in Scotland under the phase of austerity (Section 7.1.). The influence of these reforms on experiences of job demands and resources in FE lecturing in the context of occupational values are evaluated. The chapter considers these influences in regard to the salience and experience of quantitative and qualitative job demands in FE lecturing (Section 7.2.), before evaluating this dynamic in regard to job resources for FE lecturers (Section 7.3.). The subsequent discussion of the salience and experience of resources at work in a public sector reform context through the lens of professional values is structured to begin with extrinsic job resources, followed by social job resources, and, lastly, intrinsic job resources in FE lecturing. The final substantive part of this chapter (Section 7.4.) considers how these influences have shaped the above described dynamics in relation to FE lecturers' experiences of individual job outcomes.

## 7.1. The public sector reform context of work and employment in Further Education Colleges in Scotland

The purpose of this section is to provide a brief reflection on the content and dynamics of public sector reform as relevant to changes in the characteristics of work and employment and for contextualising experiences of job demands and resources for FE lecturers. This discussion is based on Appendix B, which details the core reform measures implemented across the FE colleges case study under the phase of austerity as informed by the logic of the ‘three Es’ of ‘economy’, ‘efficiency’, and ‘effectiveness’ introduced in Chapter 2.

Organisational restructuring as part of public sector reform in Scotland’s Further Education (FE) sector saw FE colleges merging into regional supra-colleges. The Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013 set out to restructure Further Education provision in Scotland into 13 new college regions by August 2013 (Audit Scotland, 2016). FE college mergers into regional supra-colleges were seen as offering the potential to harness economies of scale producing ‘efficiency savings’, such as in reducing duplication in the sector. It was argued that there was overlap in provision of FE courses in geographical areas and that FE colleges were taking neither learner ‘demand’ nor governmentally desired outcomes sufficiently into account in their course delivery models (Scottish Government, 2011a). Overall, the number of incorporated colleges was merged from 37 colleges to 20 by 2014/15. At the time of fieldwork (2017), there were a total of 26 FE colleges in Scotland across 10 single-college and three multi-college regions (Audit Scotland, 2018a).

In 2016/17, incorporated colleges in Scotland employed a full-time equivalent (FTE) of around 10,850 members of staff, of which around FTE 5,350 were teaching staff (Audit Scotland, 2018a, p. 13; Colleges Scotland, 2018, p. 30).

Staff costs represented 63% of colleges' spending in 2016/17 (Audit Scotland, 2017, p. 14). National-level bargaining to the sector was reintroduced as part of the 2013 reforms.

While the logic of 'economy' in FE college reform saw no measures targeted directly at levels of pay, the reduction of overall workforce compensation was effected in reducing staff headcount through voluntary severances. Rather than direct staff cuts, measures in support of numerical cuts to expenditure on the sector were supported through the application of 'efficiency' seeking reforms. 'Duplicate' job positions, including mid-management positions, but also the provision of courses across multiple campuses, were effected through the merging of FE colleges into 13 regions. The use of casualised contracts and negotiations around class contact time further allowed, or were intended to, achieve a more efficient utilisation reflecting fluctuating need across the academic year. Sectoral oversight under strengthened central government control, using performance measurement, and regional college boards of management resonated with the logic of 'effectiveness'. The details of reform measures provided in Appendix B incorporated relevant, publicly available documentary sources alongside information from key informants as specified in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.3.2. for details).

## 7.2. Job demands in FE lecturing and professional values: The significance and positive or negative experiences of intensity in work

### 7.2.1. Quantitative job demands in FE lecturing: Intensity in the volume of work and working time

The effects of public sector reform FE colleges in Scotland had undergone in the context of a cold fiscal climate, such as the regionalisation of FE provision, as detailed in Appendix B, and evaluated in their impact on characteristics of work and employment for FE lecturers detailed above (Section 7.1.), were connected to increases in quantitative demands reported across the case study sample. These concern both job demands in terms of workload increases and the associated extension of working hours beyond the contractual or 'norm' of working longer hours during certain times of the academic year.

#### *Professional values and experiences of reform-driven changes in the volume of work as job demands for FE lecturers*

Workload increases, on the one hand, could be traced to a reorganisation of teaching provision for efficiency, against certain markers in funding allocations. On the other hand, workload increases were affected by changes to the size and composition of the FE workforce ('economy'). Both of these resonate with the cold funding environment.

As a result of increasing pressures on the remainder of the lecturing workforce following college mergers, several rounds of voluntary severance and on college funding such as a (nearly) cost-neutral funding system, including, according to P32, P33, HR34, HR35, the cost of national level bargaining, class sizes were found to have expanded wherever possible. In rare instances attempts to increase class sizes exceeded what would be deemed appropriate from a health and safety perspective (U29; L30-U). Class size increases were noted by the vast majority of FE participants (or nearly all lecturing and union participants) with multiple years of experience within the sector and therefore a length of service predating respective college mergers. A senior union representative reflected on this:

*“Probably what has changed is class sizes have crept up and so that didn't involve changing work conditions but it meant more marking. [...] simply because of budgetary cuts, which have meant that we cram more people onto courses, we try to shorten courses. They try to get the courses done more quickly.” (U20)*

Around a quarter of union and lecturer respondents saw increases in class sizes, alongside the previously detailed effects of workforce changes to workloads, as directly connected to the funding environment. Principal respondents (P32; P33) confirmed this in terms of having expressed to evaluate and implement, wherever possible, potential avenues for maximising student contact they could obtain from each lecturer as a result of funding. In a significant share of instances, reported class increases stretched or even exceeded space, equipment and even lecturer capacity available (L3; U8; L19; L24; L25; L23; L30-U; L31-U; L27-U; U22; U28; U29). Examples given related to class rooms unable to cope with student quantities in four of the fieldwork colleges, such as class sizes of 30 to 40 students to be taught in rooms suited to 20 students. This also was reported for equipment available in these rooms whereby student numbers recruited onto computer based classes exceeded computers available (e.g. students outnumbering the computers available by three to two) (collegeG; collegel).

In another college, some classes were reportedly split up across two rooms or a lecturer scheduled for two separate classes (or units) simultaneously across two levels of the building (collegeB).

Unsurprisingly, in classes in which student numbers exceeded required learning facilities, such as computers, desks, chairs, or simply where rooms were particularly crowded, this was observed to have negative effects on student retention. The vast majority of participating lecturers was conscious of retaining students (in particular those who they felt were on the right course) and saw over-recruitment onto courses as a disservice to students. Over-recruitment was also seen as counterproductive in the light of the significant funding and target driven pressures connected to student retention participating lecturers' found themselves subjected to. A dual-participant detailed the pressures connected to student over-recruitment onto courses:

*“if there's just a sea of people in front of you, some of whom are standing up and haven't got a seat in a hot room that you know you can't keep them in too long because it's not a nice environment [...] It has repercussions for retention, for holding onto students” (L30-U)*

Moreover, in its most obvious manifestation, larger class sizes or student cohorts inevitably resulted in larger marking loads, which in particular at HN-levels where lengthy essays formed the norm proved significant. A large majority of FE lecturer and union participants discussed the large quantities of marking expected of FE lecturers. The volume of marking further increased as a result of pressures in relation to student attainment where numerous resits had to be granted.

*“Your marking for one class is a week's work, it's a 35 hour week. SQA- you get 20 minutes a paper if you've got 39 students that's a week's work. By the time you've done the resit, we don't get extra time to do that.” (L25)*



While PIs for student pass rates were not newly introduced under the latest set of reforms, the reorganisation of the core purpose of FE provision, as reflected in the content of 'Outcome Agreement' targets with an emphasis on 16 to 18 year olds and articulation to university with HN-level award, against the wider socioeconomic context, e.g. cuts in 'duplication' of courses across campuses viewed against students' limited financial means and thus geographic mobility to travel to their first choice of course, are important to note. Similarly, the threat of funding being 'clawed back' by the SFC may have become more severe considering FE colleges had newly been reclassified as public bodies and thus become unable to hold financial reserves as their previous charitable body status had allowed them to.

In seven of the nine colleges visited, an intensified pressure to achieve PIs for course completion and pass targets was noted (U5, L7, L26, U16, L17-U, U8, L9, L10, L19, L27-U, L12-2, L13-2, L14, U21-L; L23, L24, L25, L30-U, U28, U29, L30-U; L31-U). This was confirmed by several key informants (P32; P33; HR18; HR34). An HR respondent explained how funding pressures connected to student and recruitment pressures:

*“So if you’ve got a faculty who is unable, for example, whether through student retention or student recruitment, is [...] Unable to meet its target say by 2,000 credits then that is equivalent [...] to two full-time members of staff. ” (HR34)*

A union key informant (U22) saw funding pressures as affecting decisions on lowering the bar to recruit sufficient numbers of students onto a course which then both in terms of large classes and student aptitude could create additional pressure. In five of the nine fieldwork colleges several lecturer, dual and union respondents had indicated to have found themselves under pressure to offer remedial lessons, grant increasing numbers of resits and, in some of the more extreme cases, students were allowed numerous resits until they passed (collegeB; collegeF; collegeG; collegeH; collegeI). This pressure to retain students further manifested itself in several accounts of

management insisting that students who had missed large amounts of class being allowed to continue on a course and to sit exams (and be expected to pass) rather than being deregistered (U20; U21; L26; L31-U; L23; L24; L25; L30-U; U29; U28).

*Professional values and experiences of changes in the student demographic in relation to job demands for FE lecturers*

The increased amount of resits was additionally attributable to student aptitude, attitude to study, family situation as well as increasingly complex student needs, further also in the light of cuts to wider social services. Pressures to recruit larger amounts of students to some extent seemed to have contributed to students being admitted who were seen as either underqualified to cope with the demands of a course, struggling to attend or dedicate themselves to the course for various reasons or to whom at that point in their lives the course was considered as somewhat not suited (L6; L9; L10; L24; L26; L14; L23; L24; L25; L30-U, U28; U29; L31-U; L17-U; U16; L19; U20; U21; U22).

Several participants also commented that students might have simply been seeking out any course for feeling a lack of other options or for being in their vicinity rather than choosing a course out of keen interest in the subject matter as often travelling to class was irreconcilable with students' family and/or financial situation (L17-U; P32; L26; L25; L30, U28; U22; L24; L30-U). Attending FE to some students simply offered an improvement of their financial hardship through available grants and bursaries or trying to continue on in education, in spite of struggling academically, an alternative to otherwise zero-hours work. As the funding body following government direction had set targets on students progressing further up SQA levels (e.g. for progression within the college or to university) if students had needed much additional support in order to pass in the first instance, then such

targets were seen as creating more problems further down the line in pushing for such students to progress further.

Inevitably, in a system of stringent targets for retention and attainment relying on means such as resits and remediation, recruiting students with no interest in the course, students unable to attend frequently enough (for a range of reasons), or for whom study was academically too challenging (at their respective life stages) impacted lecturers' quantitative workloads. However, issues with performance indicators, retention pressures, and relatedly, the funding mechanism, stretched beyond merely quantitative workload increases demanding additional effort; as elaborated in Section 7.2.2.

### *Professional values and experiences of workforce size and composition changes as job demands for FE lecturers*

The vast majority of participating lecturers (and union respondents) saw part of the increases in workload as emanating from fewer or contractually different academic staff alongside being left to carry out the same or increasing volumes of work, including following voluntary severances, as well as cuts to support staff.

Just short of a third of union and lecturer FE respondents considered changes in the composition of the academic workforce, namely the increasing reliance on part-time, temporary staff (as well as zero-hours or 'bank' staff) as further connected to increased work effort (U8; L9; L10; L19; U21; L23; L26; L27-U; L31-U). On the one hand, temporary/part-time staff brought in to plug gaps following Voluntary Severance (VS) were not considered to cover the same amounts of work as their FT, permanent members of staff predecessors had done or to care about student marks as much (L9; L19; L26). On the other hand, several FE participants considered bank or temporary staff as needing more support, while in some instances

not being scheduled for enough hours to contribute to other teaching team activities, such as evaluation meetings (L19; L26; L10; U8; L27-U; L31-U). This was reported to have had implications for these teams' professional cohesion (L19; L26; L10; U8; L27-U; L31-U). A participant further detailed how staff on such precarious contracts had buckled under their workloads and simply left:

*“We’ve had, you know, piles of marking given to us to do for members of staff who have left. [...] We’ve had to pick up lessons, you know, for members of bank staff who have left. Unsure what’s been covered, what’s not been covered...” (L26)*

Workloads in some instances (collegeB, collegeC, collegeG, collegeH; collegel; U21) had expanded as a result of decreases at line management and support staff level in the light of the streamlining of organisational functions at point of merger. As a result of cuts to line management positions (Curriculum Manager / Senior Lecturer / Curriculum Leader) to these often being stretched across several campuses or recruiting into line management positions from outside the subject or even sector, participating lecturing staff noted a spill over of tasks (collegeC; collegeG; collegeH; L19). For instance, in two colleges, curriculum managers previously interviewed students as part of the admissions procedure which was now passed on to lecturers (collegeC; collegeG). While in those colleges respondents complained about the workload increases associated with taking over student interviews, in another college the negative effects on student suitability of taking interviewing out of the hands of those with knowledge of the course or subject into the hands of generic administrative staff and thus increased effort needed to facilitate student attainment were felt. Overloaded support staff services were noted in increases in administrative tasks among lecturing staff, such as sending out results, and increasing pastoral care (L4; L6; U8; L9; L12-1; L12-2; L12-3; L13-1; L14; L19; U21; L23; L24; L25; L26; U28; U29; L30; L31-U). Task expansions outwith the core lecturer role was further

to some extent seen as connected to cuts to wider social services (U22; L24; L30-U). A lecturer reflected on how their job role had expanded:

*“... we’re becoming social workers, lecturers, administerial assistants, we’re trying to do it all.” (L12-2)*

The vast majority of lecturer (and union) participants reported spending discretionary effort to seeing students achieve and saw it as their professional purpose to invest energies to help students pass (if yet within certain limitations). A couple of participants, however, detailed how the scope of tasks encompassed by their roles had decreased as a result of quality systems related tasks being removed from them post-merger, much to their frustration (L3; U20).

While the effort demanded by increasing workloads contributed significantly to felt strain by the vast majority of lecturer and union participants, was perceived to being at breaking point, reportedly exceeded lecturers’ capacity to cope, or heavily depended on summer holidays for recuperation, student-related workload increases could be seen as challenge demands insofar as there was no conflict with professional values in terms of professional standards and professional autonomy to judge the quality of work being maintained and met. This extended to there being no further conflict in terms of the underlying reasons for increasing numbers of students in classes clashing with lecturers’ values (such the shifting purpose of FE provision). This sense of role conflict is subsequently elaborated on under Section 7.2.2.

*Experiences of working time extensification as a job demand in FE lecturing*

The work intensification manifested itself in increases in workload which increased working time overall. Most lecturers reported regularly working (far) beyond contractual hours, working on weekends and evenings, through lunch breaks and holidays (22 L/U respondents out of 32). Several participants highlighted that while it had always been part of the job to work longer hours during peak times which was then accounted for in having more holidays, the additional workload aggravated the extent to which overtime was worked (U15; U21; U20; L31-U). A lecturer who was new to the role indicated to work 80 to 90 hour weeks to be able to cope with the amount of work (L2-U).

Working through nearly all breaks, at least a couple of evenings during the week and/or a couple of weekends during a month was seen as the norm by most lecturer and union participants. However, not all lecturers reported having to work overtime to cope with the demands of their workloads or found the hours still favourable compared to those worked under previous self-employment (L3, L4, L7). Notably, these lecturers were teaching at lower SCQF levels (as opposed to, for instance, university access courses) which would be simpler to mark and/or contained fewer unit assessments, such as awarding a pass or fail for an assignment requiring students to make a window or door rather than grading a lengthy essay.

Not only was a spill over of work into evenings and weekends noted, several participants further indicated to work during holidays in order to cope with their workload or prepare for the next academic year (L6; U8; L11; L14; L19; L26; L31-U) which was compounded where such effort went to waste as a result of curriculum changes in the new year to accommodate for variability in teaching proficiencies among continuously changing temporary (bank) staff (L26).

A lecturer conveyed working for two weeks during the six weeks of summer holidays:

*“When we’re off on the 6 weeks holiday, there’s work to do, you’ll have a month. So I remember last summer I probably worked the equivalent of two weeks of those where I still had the 4 weeks off.” (L6)*

Cuts in allowances that had previously been in place to allow for (new) unit generation, updating existing units in line with latest SQA changes or heavier marking loads at HN-level further put pressure on lecturers’ workloads and, ultimately, working time (L9; L11; L14; U16; L17-U).

### 7.2.2. Qualitative job demands in FE lecturing: Psychological intensity in work

Pressures on participating FE lecturers’ workloads have had a dual impact on the types of job demands experienced. Sources for changes in quantitative demands have simultaneously impacted qualitative job demands experienced by the vast majority of FE lecturer (and union participants) as is detailed below. Participants described several qualitative job demands in relation to shifting expectations of FE lecturers connected to the nature and drivers of increases in workloads, a related redefinition of social relations with students, further subject to the influence of shifts in the characteristics of the student demographic as a result of changes in policy direction (i.e. emphasis on 16 to 19 year olds), the wider resources available in the public service environment in the light of austerity-driven cuts with related spill-over effects (such as the scarcity of mental health support) and issues emanating from managerial oversight.

*Professional values and experiences of psychosocial intensity in work for FE lecturers as a job demand in a reform context: Role conflict*

Performance targets in terms of student retention and attainment and the implications on the work lecturers were expected to carry out, such as granting increasing amounts of resits or offering remedial classes, beyond a certain point of additional, discretionary effort and depending on perceptions of student attitudes to study, conflicted with around half of lecturer respondents' ideas in terms of what their tasks and responsibilities were. Workload increases in quantitative terms, such as more work required to help students pass (e.g. through remediation classes), further put strain on the majority of lecturer participants qualitatively in clashing with their professional values. Students who had failed to attend for extended significant amounts of time, irrespective of whether this was through potentially no fault of their own, otherwise insufficiently engaged with a class or struggled academically beyond a certain level and therefore had not met certain standards expected should not be passed by all means in the view of most lecturer and union participants (U5; L4; L6; L26; L9; L10; L11; L19; L27-U; L23; L24; L25; U20; U21; L31-U; L30-U; L17-U; U16; U28; U29).

The quality in teaching provision, which also depended on time to prepare, concerned most lecturer and union respondents which ultimately provided learners with the foundation for achieving certain standards. Whether these standards would in the end be achieved was, however, widely seen as depending on the student, their attitude to study, aptitude, and life situation. While student attainment was the central source of job satisfaction cited by lecturer and union participants, such learner achievement was by the majority of these participants seen as within the confines of standards set by the lecturers whereby this did not necessarily mean a student should progress or pass by all means.



A lecturer explained:

*“...there is a standard that you have to achieve to be able to say that you have reached a HNC or and HND level and I can't buck that standard simply because of your circumstances.” (L6)*

The notion of quality in the process of teaching could not be equated to quantitative, student through-put based notions of quality as captured through performance indicators and reinforced through punitive funding clauses rather than professional peer review and internal standards upheld through socialisation into professional values. A union participant explained how the SFC understood quality:

*“Clearly from a quality point of view then they tend to look more at how many finished the course and how many passed it.” (U22)*

Ultimately, several lecturers stated that in the end it was up to a student to do the work to show that a certain standard had been met. It was in tasks connected to these increasing pressures and expectations on lecturers to pass increasing numbers (or all) students that the vast majority of these participants objected to and some were unwilling to carry out, therefore, producing a sense of role conflict. Moreover, several lecturer participants' notions of student achievement considered these within the context of a students' ability and the exhibited attitude to study which takes into account wider life skills and confidence gained rather than purely academic achievement. A senior lecturer explained:

*“it's when somebody fails an exam or whatever, it happens, accept it. Science is difficult, it's not meant to be easy. [...] the student is attending, they're learning social skills, they're getting in a bus, they've never done that before, they're independent.” (L9)*

While there was general agreement that helping students pass was of course part of an FE lecturers' job, but to some this was within its limitations. Several

lecturers felt that vast amounts of discretionary effort needed to help students pass not only cheapened the quality of the students' achievement and qualification (U5, L26, U16; L17-U; L23; U20; U21; L24; L9; L23; L31-U), but also clashed with roughly most of lecturers' ideas of professional standards and integrity. A lecturer reflected:

*“There’s a big stress point for lecturers cause there’s a kind of integrity line, isn’t there? At what point do you give the student so much help that it’s- it’s tipped over the line and they’ve not really achieved it themselves” (L23)*

Lecturer and union participants discussed pressures to be passing students who from their professional point of view should not (or could not) pass, however much sympathy they had for the student (U5; L6; L9; L11; L19; U16; L17-U; U21; U20; L31-U; L26-U; L24; L25; L23; L30-U; L27-U). A few lecturers from industries where having attained a certain standard of knowledge was crucial in regards to health and safety, namely engineering and construction subjects, or from subject areas where students would go on to working with vulnerable members of society, such as health and social care, even raised concerns around the fitness to practice of some passing students (U5; L26; U16; U20; U21). U28 and U29 also raised similar points in terms of cuts to lecturing posts and therefore teaching provision which affected the knowledge and therefore fitness to practice acquired by students.

All participating lecturers (and union participants as well as principal respondents) saw their core professional purpose as helping students achieve positive outcomes for themselves, in particular those learners to whom FE constituted a second chance and opportunity to enhance their social mobility. This to some extent, however, conflicted with the government's shift in focusing on the youngest age brackets in particular. Government policy defining the public interest as first and foremost offering all 16 to 19 year olds places in education resembling the 'once only model' of

education whereby school leavers continue in education right after school, this was viewed with scepticism by several FE respondents. In particular, the objective of college mergers to reduce duplication in provision in combination with the overall low geographic mobility of FE students, further aggravated by increasing financial struggles or caring responsibilities affecting their ability to travel, to some extent posed a challenge to what was by lecturer and union participants, as well management participants P32, P33, HR34, seen as the traditional purpose of FE colleges as places of personal transformation and second chances. As a participant put it:

*“They’re cutting course numbers all the time so there’s less and less opportunity, not more.” (L25)*

Some FE respondents considered that what was best for an individual, especially a school leaver, at a certain point in time may not necessarily be a place in education, but perhaps rather mental health support or time to figure out what suited them best. There was a sense that opportunities for learners and second chances across all ages were eroded (U28; U29; L30-U; U22; P32; U15; L31-U; L25; U16; L19; U20; L27-U), also as a result of wider cuts to other parts of the public services that enabled students to attend (L13-1; L14; L30-U; L19; U28; U29; L24; U22; L6; U21; U20). Indeed, this perception is supported by reductions in duplication of courses across multiple college locations and reductions in part-time places. Several FE respondents expressed concern in terms of how students were (in some instances aggressively) recruited onto courses perhaps unsuited to their interests, abilities, and circumstances in their private lives which as some participants remarked then counted as their one government funded shot at further (and higher) education (U28; U29; L26; L24; L25; L30-U; L31-U; U22; L17-U; L25). Some issues around withdrawing students from classes who had quit some time ago were also reported by several FE participants. The majority of lecturer participants felt that college regionalisation (i.e. college mergers), alongside budget cuts, were a disservice to students which to a large

proportion of FE participants clashed with the notion of second chances for learners when these were at a point in their lives at which they genuinely felt able to engage with their studies and knew where their interests and strengths laid. A 'dual-participant' reflected on this:

*"...at one point a lecturer would have been teaching people who are in the industry or want to be in the industry out of some burning desire or interest. Now some people are on the course because it's a course. It's just 'a' course."* (L17-U)

Overall, there appeared to be somewhat of a chasm between the espoused ideals and purposes of reforms and professional ideals. Several more sceptical respondents considered the reforms to have been driven by a governmental desire to 'massage youth unemployment figures' or business case, cost-based logic than educational rationale (L17-U; P32; U15; L24; U22; U28; U29).

Ultimately, the increases in the tasks expected of FE lecturers, which conflicted with their notions of the tasks their roles comprised, public interest, professionally shared standards and understandings of quality, not only produced the above described sense of role conflict to some. This potentially was further compounded in that these changing role expectations threatened professionally valued practitioner control over judging the standards in and quality of outcomes of FE lecturers' work as discussed in Section 7.2.2.3.

### *Professional values and psychosocial intensity in work for FE lecturers in a reform context: Managerial and student behaviour and emotional job demands*

Connected to the previously discussed increases in quantitative job demands and pressures tied to the latest set of reforms to FE in Scotland were reports of psychosocial job demands beyond role conflict. Accounts of poor

managerial behaviour permeating all levels were widely conveyed across the lecturer and union informant sample. This was further seen as connected to a lack of 'understanding about education', the FE sector more broadly and FE lecturing in particular on the side of management, including boards of management and Colleges Scotland, and in management not sharing a background as educators/teachers where they previously would have, such as principals who previously would have had teaching experience (L3; U8; L9; L10; L11; L19; L13-1; L13-2; L13-3; L14; U15; U16; U20; L23; L24; L25; U28; U29; L30-U; L31-U). Further examples concerned line management posts (e.g. curriculum managers or senior lecturers) since the college regionalisation reforms having become opened up to recruitment from outwith subject area or even those without experience in education overall.

There was an increasing feeling that management did not share the same values and professional background as lecturing staff as a result of turnover especially in mid to senior management positions. With curriculum managers working across campuses responsible for larger teams, several colleges changed the qualifications required for this role. These changes stretched from allowing lecturers from a different subject specialism and unfamiliarity with some of the levels taught (e.g. HN-level) to become curriculum managers (collegeC; collegeG) to the hiring of line managers with no background or experience in neither education nor management (collegeH). A senior union key informant reflected on the lack of a background in education/teaching across management, including those on the NJNC:

*“The nub of all of our arguments have been about teaching and what's involved in preparing to teach and so forth. The vast majority of their side have never been teachers. The vast majority of the other side are professional managers. Whereas our side are all people who are teachers, who actually do the job and fully appreciate what's required”  
(U20)*

Yet, it should be noted here that out of the FE case study's five management respondents, both principals (P32 and P33) had previously worked as FE lecturers, if yet a long time had since elapsed, and two HR respondents (HR18 and HR34) had at least spent their prior careers exclusively in other parts of the public services. HR35, who had joined FE from a background purely based in retail, proved the exception.

Dissatisfactions with or complaints about management variably across all hierarchical tiers related to adverse behaviours, such as bullying, a lack of understanding of the role of lecturers and education underpinning approaches to management, being subjected to undue pressure, such as the threat of courses going on review for failure to attain certain PIs.

A proportion of respondents indicated that bullying was prevalent or a 'culture of managerialism' (U8; U16; L17-U; L19; L23; L24; L25; U28; U29; L30-U). Several participants described how social exclusion, (the threat of) unfavourable timetabling (incl. a threat of reduced hours), threat of job loss, scheduling of meetings and being taken off classes at a higher SQCF level were used to exert pressure (U16; L19; L24; L30-U; L31-U; U28 U29; L26; L19). For instance, classes with higher or lower marking loads could differently be distributed as covert 'punishment', time tables or meetings could be scheduled to interfere with duties outside of work, such as picking children up from school, lecturers could be moved to another campus (with the potential of a longer commute or more work-life balance interference) or temporary, part-time staff coerced into teaching outwith their timetabled hours and subject of expertise in otherwise being denied the prospect of a fulltime, permanent contract. There was an awareness of the threat of courses being shut down and, ultimately, an implied threat of redundancy (U16; L30-U; L31-U; L26; L24; L27-U), although L7 viewed this as a case of lecturers' jobs being concerned with getting students to pass anyways and there not being any space for "passengers" not meeting PIs.

A respondent further detailed the pressures surrounding PIs essentially amounting to bullying:

*“...pressure is put on staff. You know, your PIs are poor, your results are poor, you might not be given that class next year because if you can't get them through we might need to put you on another class [...] I hate to use the word bullying but it can be seen to be like that.”*  
(U16)

Though several union respondents were mindful to point out that there were examples of good managers, across a proportion of the lecturer and union sample there were examples of management styles being described negatively in terms of , for instance, being ‘autocratic’, ‘top down’ and there was talk of ‘micromanagement’ (L3; U5; U8; L13-2; L13-3; L23; L25; U28; U29; L30-U; L24; L27-U; L31-U).

There were further perceptions of management (line and beyond) as underqualified, clueless, inefficient, incompetent and unable to get a job elsewhere (L31-U; L12-2; L13-2; L13-1; L13-3; L25; L24; L23; U28; U29; L30-U). Several participants noted how new management structures and styles conflicted with their sense of professional conduct and autonomy (to make judgements, input on the curriculum and in being better qualified for this) in particular (U5; U8; U15; L23; L24; L25; L9; L3; L4; L31-U; L30-U).

Several respondents felt that management should support lecturing staff on what should be a joint objective of achieving the best outcomes for learners rather than, for instance, “bark orders” (L25). A union participant explained:

*“Some managers are very dictatorial and very prescriptive, whereas professionals, I think, should be left to be kind of self-regulating, self-guiding because they're all here to do one thing and that's to get their students through courses and I think there's too much micromanagement going on”* (U5)

Lecturers in the three out of four colleges (collegeB; collegeC; collegeH) in which the bulk of lecturer data was gathered felt that management (and boards of management), especially those from a business background, did not have the best interests of students or further education as a whole at heart but rather financial imperatives or self-interest. As such management by some was seen not to share the same values and neither was seen as a legitimate source of authority:

*“They forget we’ve all got degrees and more so than some of the clowns that’s trying to tell us what to do.” (L13-2)*

This widely perceived chasm between the perceived expertise in supporting lecturing staff and understanding of education in management was a prominent feature in complaints made of managerial behaviour at various levels of management (L3; U8; L9; L10; L11; L19; L13-1; L13-2; L13-3; L14; U15; U20; L23; L24; L25; U28; U29; L30-U; L31-U). This was widely seen as connected to or at least as compounded by turnover in managerial positions following college mergers and recruitment of managers from outwith the sector. These managers now were further responsible for larger staff cohorts.

To a lesser degree, several lecturers indicated feeling vulnerable to student complaints which in some instances was seen as compounded by managerial practice perceived to exploit or even fabricate these (U5; L11; U16; L23; L25; L30-U; L31-U; U28; U29). In particular where students were failing units (and/or therefore courses) these were reportedly more likely to become aggressive or utilise the complaints system to push for their desired results. Overall, some FE participants (union and lecturer) remarked on the increasing additional support needs and expectations placed on lecturers by students, such as lecturer availability for a plethora of issues and time frames for obtaining feedback, grades or responses to emails (L6; U8; L9; L10; L11; L2; L12-2; L12-3; L14; L30-U; U20; U22). While this was seen as adding pressure, unlike pressures imposed on lecturers from outwith the profession, such as those connected to PIs, this to some extent had been more part of a



traditional professional concern for their students and desire to help them, if yet the causes of the increases in these pressures were questioned. Under such circumstances, these pressures could be considered challenge demands. However, there were limitations. Rather than student complaints per se, it was management's handling of these that were the primary issue to several lecturer and union participants, such as management adopting a default position that 'a student was right and a lecturer wrong' (L19; L31-U) or the lecturer, not student, had underachieved (L26). A lecturer pointed out that management's handling of an aggressive student that was the overarching issue to them:

*"...It's FE, you know, I'm no kidding myself, it's not Cambridge. I don't- I accept that it can be a lot more boisterous here than in a lot of established education. That's fine, but it's just the idea that we have to put up with anything." (L25)*

### 7.3. Job resources in FE lecturing and professional values: The significance and positive or negative experiences of material and non-material job rewards

The following section addresses professional job resources in FE lecturing again following the logic of the analytical framework, starting at the overarching extrinsic level in regard to terms and conditions including pay, contractual arrangements regarding working time and job security. Social job resources in FE lecturing are presented, which concern collective interest representation arrangements, managerial and work team relations, and prosocial job characteristics. Lastly, autonomy as a central intrinsic job resource is discussed.

### 7.3.1. Extrinsic job resources in FE lecturing: Terms and conditions and job (status) security

#### *Professional values and experiences of terms and conditions as job resources in a reform context*

Discussions around pay and other contractual elements of the employment relation in FE during fieldwork were inextricably linked to the harmonisation of terms and conditions for so called 'unpromoted' FE lecturers and the immediate 'promoted' grades above them (which include, for instance, senior lecturers and curriculum managers) as part of the move back to national level bargaining under the regionalisation of FE college reform provisions (see Appendix B for details).

As far as lecturer participants are concerned, there was a minor degree of contradiction in views held with regard to terms and conditions. There was a sense that lecturer respondents felt their jobs were equal and should therefore be remunerated equally in the same vein, as some said, teachers, police officers, firefighters or postal workers were (L1; L3; L26; L19; L27-U; L13-1; L13-2; L13-3; L14; L11; U16; L9; L10; U20; L31-U; U28; U29; L30-U; U22; U21; U8; L17-U; U5).

The majority of lecturer participants did not consider themselves poorly paid (per se), did not place primary importance on the levels of pay associated with the lecturing job or/and expressed to not care for whatever increment in their pay they would see as a result of national bargaining by which they considered to gain little. Lecturer participants subscribed to the notion of fairness of pay (as well as that of further terms and conditions) as this being equal for all which could be seen as reflecting to some extent the social dimension of perceptions of pay and sense of social cohesion among members of that profession.

As a dual-participant put it:

*“I believe in it as a principle we should all be paid the same, we’re all public servants doing ostensibly the same job and the analogy is the teachers are the same.” (L27-U)*

Caution in drawing such connections here must, however, be paid considering the heavily unionised nature of the sample which, even if this is reflective of the wider FE lecturing population, was collected against the backdrop of an industrial dispute and campaign centring on equality in pay and other terms and conditions. Such equality was also promised in government reform moving the sector’s collective bargaining back to national level which would see a harmonisation of lecturers’ terms and conditions. Yet, considering the cumulative pressures of the intensity of the strike measures taken (as described under Section 7.3.2.), the associated financial challenges of relinquishing a significant share of potentially more than half of a month’s wages, and the strike days coinciding with the end of term and exam time, this to some extent could be considered to show a genuine sense of the importance of and commitment to such social aspects of working conditions at least among that share of the lecturing population.

While there was some mention of some lecturers succumbing to these pressures and breaking pickets at one college (collegeC), there is evidence to suggest that these egalitarian views are reflective of the previously indicated wider sentiment toward support for equality. Every (incorporated) college had voted in favour of strike action under the new, higher thresholds imposed by the Trade Union Act 2016. Reports from colleges B, C, D, G, and H (and some extent I) pointed to high turnout and participation rates. These were confirmed at principal P32’s college who disclosed that the vast majority of their lecturing staff (all bar around 30 lecturers) had taken strike action when they deemed them well paid and to do so for little gain themselves.

At the same time, several lecturers teaching at HN-level (corresponding to higher education) did not see themselves as on a par with their colleagues teaching at lower levels of the SCQF in terms of work effort required for yet equal pay (L17-U; L25; 13-1; 13-3). This increased effort concerned larger numbers of, for instance, unit assessments required at that level for which there used to be unofficial remission time in some colleges or departments (L9; L11; L14; U16; L17-U; U15). However, the across the sample widespread relative lesser importance of earning a higher pay, of pay beyond making a reasonable living or of pay as primary source of work motivation and wide spread significant dissatisfaction and struggle with the intensity of work, this may suggest that it is the differentials in effort which were viewed negatively more so or rather than a desire to be paid more than colleagues teaching at lower levels. An example relates to a lecturer who opted to reduce their hours in the light of the quantitative demands posed by the job:

*“...a lot of my colleagues are saying that they are prepared to take the hit of whatever it would be I don't know 3 or 400 pound a month for- to enjoy going back to enjoying the work” (L6)*

Further taking into account the significant appeal of the amount of holidays the job offered that attracted and enticed a significant proportion of lecturers to remain (L4; L6; L9; L10; L11; L19; U21; L23; L24; L26; L27-U; U29; L31-U), also as these were seen as family friendly, a desire to reduce spill over of work into this time rather than increases in pay arguably were of more importance to HN-level lecturers. These had been hardest hit by the previously discussed work intensification associated with larger class sizes and retention pressures. A lecturer reflected on the extended times they could be working beyond contract and yet be paid the same as colleagues in hairdressing not having to work such hours:

*“I just assume that at weekends I'm going to be sitting, I can sit on a Sunday for six hours in the table in the kitchen marking students' work. That's unpaid work” (L14)*

As far as management's efforts to connect the pay harmonisation increments with wider terms and conditions during the dispute, in particular class contact time and, initially, holidays are concerned, this was a tremendous source of concern to the vast majority of lecturer and union participants. On the one hand, the majority of participants already felt unable to cope with their workloads in the time available to which increasing contact time would add more pressure. On the other hand, and somewhat more crucially, adequate time being available to prepare for contact hours was seen as central to deliver quality in teaching which was seen as threatened by management's proposals for contact time. A dual-participant elaborated:

*“the biggest, the biggest means of stress is definitely contact hours and the expectations of the management, [...] which seems not to recognise sometimes that there is contractual agreements, that it's not just a notion in someone's head that they should only do so many hours a week. That's what you're meant to do for reasons of quality. Quality of education delivery.” (L17-U)*

Considering the wide-spread accounts of overtime and spill over into non-work time, such as weekends and holidays/term breaks, which were already considered unsustainable and tied to reports of lecturers planning on or considering leaving, having left, being off sick with stress or having stepped down from a promoted position or switched to less hours (L19; L6; U15; L14; L23-25; L27; U20 U21; U28 U29; L30-U; U8; L19; L6) as further detailed under Section 7.4., increases in contact time requiring more preparation for more classes and reductions in holidays were seen as a significant threat in terms of already excessive stress levels. While no detriment clauses preserved lecturers' more favourable contractual arrangements around contact time in main fieldwork colleges, this illustrates the increased pressure the increase to 23 contact hours implied for those not protected. However, at four of all of the sampled FE colleges the national agreement around contact hours was associated with a slight improvement, one college in which this

worked out as roughly the same, and in the other fieldwork colleges management stood to gain one to two hours. A union respondent explained:

*“...there were a lot of people who came out on strike not for the money because they weren’t going to get very much out of that but for, you know, decent conditions and they are on their knees” (U28)*

To the majority of lecturer respondents, however, effort had already been excessive to which money did not compare. As one lecturer (L6) remarked considering the total hours worked and spill over into time technically considered off work (such as evenings, weekends, holidays) hourly pay probably effectively worked out at national minimum wage level. In particular, lecturer and union respondents who had come in from industry or who were teaching subjects relevant to industry/business occupations had either taken a step down in their pay or were aware of how much more favourable this would be in industry (L6; L12-1-3; L13-1-3; L19; U20; U21; L27-U). The purpose of FE was what had attracted the majority of lecturers into their teaching positions as well as holidays. Holidays in particular were seen by several participants as crucial for recuperation and a main attractive feature of the job. Several respondents emphasised that terms and conditions ought to reflect the professional status of the occupation needing to be preserved. A union interviewee commented:

*“...it’s like a race to the bottom [...] they’re trying to get rid of all of these professional terms and conditions and pay. Yeah, they’re trying not to pay us like professional workers.” (U8)*

Increases in one resource in the light of the wage-effort-bargain therefore threatened other resources, such as further encroaches to what already was a lack of work-life-balance in terms of managing to complete work in working hours and times and, ultimately also contributed to a sense of further declining job security on top of the threat to this posed by funding mechanisms.

Moreover, in one college (collegel), while lecturers did welcome the move back to national level collective bargaining in principle, there was concern that the uplift in pay to best practice in the sector would be associated with redundancies. Funding arrangements under which 'unsuccessful' courses are cut have therefore contributed to a threat in job security. The prospect of redundancies as a result of pay increments to harmonise this across the sector therefore constitutes an inter-dynamic with job security as a job resource in a cold fiscal climate. Moreover, while pay has a significant connection to material living standards in the same vein as working time arrangements influence opportunities for experiencing work-life-balance and recovery, the resourcefulness of these contractual elements of the employment relation in FE lecturing in the light of the prior arguments appears to some extent depend on the social dimension of equality among a group of peers.

### *Professional values and experiences of job (status) security as a job resource in a reform context*

Considering that the majority of the lecturing cohort interviewed was in fulltime, permanent positions (including those receiving remission/'factory time' for their union duties), such positions prior to the 2005 and 2013 reforms to Scottish Further Education could have been considered relatively secure once obtained. For about a third of participating lecturers irrespective of for how long they had been teaching in FE, part-time, temporary work had been the route into their more secure fulltime permanent positions which could have taken years to build up to. Thereafter, however, FE lecturing jobs were (prior to the reforms at least) perceived as reasonably secure by several participants. While the proportion of part-time temporary to fulltime staff had largely appeared to have remained the same over the years and in spite of favourable permanisation of hours agreements, several FE respondents were nonetheless concerned that achieving fulltime, permanent

status had become harder and that even once this was achieved it did not offer the same degree of job (status) security as previously as a result of the cold fiscal climate and funding models (U20; U21; L31-U; L14; L6; L26; U8; L27-U). A union respondent elaborated:

*“...[temporary part-time, including zero-hours] staff find it incredibly difficulty to come into the sector and retain a full-time job. A permanent job.” (U21)*

Although the Scottish Government’s commitment to a no compulsory redundancy policy was considered to offer a degree of job security by a few participants, a dual-participant noted that compliance could not practically be enforced and that management in their college were de facto refusing to guarantee adhering to the Government’s guidance (L30-U). Moreover, as U16 argued, a VS payment did not *per se* make leaving the job voluntary (i.e. less forced):

*“There have been 15 hundred I think 2,000 lecturers made redundant over the years simply because of the cuts. Now it’s not because these lecturers wanted to leave the service it was because they had no real option, there were no jobs for them, they merged colleges, they’d done away with jobs [...] Now it’s a voluntary severance it was called that but it was redundancy basically.” (U16)*

Courses failing to recruit and retain what were deemed sufficient numbers of students would be subject to assessment and potentially either not go ahead in the same academic year or not be offered again the next year. Several principal, (dual-)union and HR participants (P32, P33, HR34, L31-U, L30-U, U20, U21) indicated that the curriculum was subject to annual review. This in effect in some instances implied a potential loss of hours or courses, being moved to a lower level of teaching or even ‘voluntary’ severances (de facto redundancies) (L2; U8; U16; L19; L30-U; L31-U; L26).



A dual-participant explained:

*“... I mentioned this idea that the college was a job for life and it’s not, you know. There’s no such thing as a fulltime permanent job because if the course doesn’t exist anymore they’ll make people redundant. So if your courses drop by 50% immediately you’re thinking ‘I’m going to get pulled up here’” (L31-U)*

A participant (L31-U) remarked that a number of courses even were shut down within two weeks of starting. However, further FE respondents perceived job security to be greater in public service compared to industry (L17-U; U5; L27-U).

A P33 explained that as a result of the funding model they were continuously reviewing their curriculum, potentially needing to move staff on in certain curriculum areas to remain financially viable also in the light of the cost of collective bargaining. It was also at that college that further participants were concerned of national level bargaining, and the associated pay increase, to have come at the expense of lecturing positions within the college, namely according to L3’s expectations *“we’re talking about 16% of lecturing staff within FE will lose their job maybe within the next year, you know. So national bargaining definitely has an effect.”* However, this concern was not widely expressed in interviews held at the other colleges beyond a few interviews (U16; L31-U; P32; HR34; HR35).

The threat to job security as a spill over effect of the cost of national bargaining illustrates a scenario in which gains in other job resources (if in some colleges more so than others), namely pay, equality therein, contractual working time arrangements around contact hours and collective voice mechanisms as a social resource appear to flow from losses in another.

As a result there was a concern among some of the union participants that temporary contracts would become more prevalent in spite of permanisation agreements in place.

However, as indicated earlier, not all FE participants felt a sense of a decline in job security as a resource and to others this threat appeared less significant. This could partially be attributed to the comparative attractiveness of leaving, in particular should working conditions further deteriorate and/or voluntary severance schemes become available again, as FE participants reported for themselves or their colleagues (L27-U; L19; U8; U15; U20; U21; L13-1; L13-2; L13-3; L26; L23; 24; 25; L31-U; L30-U-; U28; U29). The attractiveness of leaving is also further explored under Section 7.4.

Some FE participants (L6; L14; L23; 24; 25; L13-3; L13-2; L19; U21; L31-U; L27-U) were considering leaving should what they viewed as favourable working conditions be eroded, such as holidays and being able to deliver what they saw as the purpose of FE, or if work intensity and the qualitative job demands in terms of poor managerial behaviour should progress. This suggests that there is a larger perceived threat to job status insecurity whereby core favourable characteristics of the job are seen as having deteriorated and/or potentially as (further) dissolving. This perception was heightened by the backdrop of the continued industrial dispute and lack of a finalised agreement on harmonised terms and conditions. Proposals on the management side for contact hours and holiday allocations fuelled speculations over worst case scenarios on what the expected impact on their terms and conditions could be by the majority of FE participants interviewed against this backdrop. Yet under no detriment clauses, this posed no actual threat to them but rather by several lecturer and union participants was seen as an erosion of or challenge to their professional terms and conditions, signifying their professional status and as a threat to preserving this for future generations (U8; L31-U; L10; L13-3+; L14; L27-U; U28; U29).

### 7.3.2. Social job resources in FE lecturing: Relational aspects of work and employment

#### *Professional values and collective interest representation as a resource at work: Trade unionism and collective bargaining arrangements*

Changes in social resources at the overarching employment relations level in FE lecturing emanated from the Scottish Government's reform provisions to move the FE sector back to national level bargaining as part of the regionalisation agenda of FE in 2013 (see also Appendix B).

In that sense, this perceived strength of the union side as well as weaker branches being able to benefit from stronger union branches under national level collective bargaining, would appear to have benefitted corresponding social job resources in FE lecturing. The strike action saw the retention of more favourable terms and conditions under no detriment clauses as well as upwards harmonisation of the un-promoted lecturer's pay scale therefore constituting a boost to other extrinsic job resources.

Union official respondents across all levels equally expressed frustration in terms of the employer side's engagement with the process of harmonising terms and conditions as well as renegeing on implementing the pay deal settled in 2016 (U5; U8; U15; U16; U20; U21; U22; U28; U29; L30-U). Most lecturers were angered by the employers' side refusal to implement this pay deal which may have compounded negative views of management previously described.

Overall, the majority of lecturers subscribed to the collectivist idea around trade unionism and aspect of equality for members of their profession. There was a strong sense of frustration around management renegeing on

implementing the deal necessitating the level of industrial action across the bulk of the union and lecturer sample, which reflected the campaign's banner of 'honour the deal' which ultimately culminated in the industrial dispute. This appeared aggravated by the timing of the strike action to coincide with the end of term and arguably also was propelled by resentment of austerity induced budget cuts, the reforms to the sector (i.e. college regionalisation) being perceived as ill-conceived and a disservice to education (both in terms of reductions in student places and lecturer positions), and incidents of managerial misconduct, such as controversy around VS packages, that had riddled college mergers.

A senior union official considered the cumulative effects of dissatisfactions with changes the FE sector had seen in the fallout of austerity to have garnered the memberships' support for strike action:

*"...a lot of that anger and demoralization led to overwhelming support for strike action. [...] so I think austerity, the whole- what's happened to us since 2009 in FE has been a constant series of cuts. Dramatic cuts to services." (U20)*

Attitudes to trade unionism beyond the dispute were mixed but some scepticism by a few lecturers as to whether the union had benefitted them aside, being in the union largely was perceived as favourable or, at a minimum, as preferable to not being in the union. Several lecturers indicated to share the 'left wing', 'socialist/Marxist', or collectivist values they saw embedded within the trade union movement (L6; L14; L30-U; L25; U20; U28), while a wider share of lecturers subscribed to equality and peer support among members of their profession (L1; L3; L26; L19; L27-U; L13-1; L13-2; L13-3; L14; L11; U16; L9; L10; U20; L31-U; U28; U29; L30-U; U22; U21; U8; L17-U; U5). This had created a sense of divide between them and those (albeit few) colleagues who had broken the strike action (L13-1; L13-2; L13-3; L14; U16).

A few FE respondents considered help with student complaints as a benefit of union membership (L1; U5; L7).

The majority of lecturer and union participants indicated to feel discomfort having to take strike action and some sought to emphasise that they did not consider themselves nor the union 'militant' or to argue for argument's sake. As a lecturer put it "*I'm not one of these militant [trade unionists]*" (L2), This was contrary to HR35 who thought the EIS FELA under the new national arrangements had "radicalised" lecturers in their college and across the sector.

A few participants were more sceptical of the effectiveness of the union or felt that the move back to national level bargaining had in effect weakened their previously stronger branches (L7; L12-1; L12-2; L12-3). These participants thought that national bargaining had diluted down the previously greater influence their local branches could exert at enterprise level in now more branches needing to find common ground and their hands otherwise being more tied.

### *Professional values and experiences of management and work teams as job resources*

In addition to changes to the contractual composition of teaching workforces in some parts of several FE colleges (Section 7.2.1.1.1.), there have been further structural shifts in the composition of the FE workforce. Rather than creating leaner organisations across the hierarchy, it was felt that the top had remained either the same or increased while the more direct line management of lecturers (senior lecturers, curriculum managers, and heads of departments) was widely reported to have reduced significantly (collegeB; collegeG; collegeC; collegeH; collegeI). There was a sense among some respondents that there were too many or increased mid- and top-level management posts and support staff in proportion to lecturing posts (L7; L12-1; L12-2; L13-1; L14; U16; L19; U20), including a sense that management structures pre-mergers were flatter (L19; U22; L14).

As a result, several lecturer participants either had not met their new line management in person, had only met them on a very small amount of occasions, had only met them well into their time in post or even felt unable to put a face on whom their new line management was. Several lecturers further remarked that they similarly felt further detached from higher up tiers of management, for instance being unable to identify who was in the college's executive.

A lecturer reflected on how out of touch with their work colleagues and management they had felt since being transferred to a different college:

*"I haven't even met half of the science staff that work in a different faculty and [another] campus. I've never met them. I've never met any of the staff from [yet another campus] and I've been here [nine months] and I've had one meeting with my head of faculty." (L11)*

Reductions in line management positions (senior lecturer and curriculum managers) and these being spread across multiple campuses were widely reported to have negatively impacted the amount and quality of support that could be obtained from line management, broken up effective team structures and overall hindered communication channels. The majority of FE respondents felt management was less visible, less able to help (or qualified to) and that there was less contact with management, to the extent that several lecturers had not met their new line management months after these were instated or barely had meeting with them. As previously detailed, there were reports of line managers being inadequately qualified to effectively support lecturers, in particular where line managers had been replaced with recruits from outwith the discipline or sector, leaving lecturers to pick up their slack (L13-1; L13-2; L13-3; L19; L23; L24; L25; U28; U29; L30-U). Several lecturer participants felt that the most capable line managers had left at the expense of previously good working relations (L13-1; L13-2; L13-3; L24; L25; U28; U29; L30-U).

The flipside of reports of a lack of contact with line management are the incidents of micro-management forming psychosocial demands discussed earlier (Section 7.2.2.). The deterioration in relations with line management in particular might also be reflected in the increasing amounts of grievances taken out that would have previously been dealt with more informally (U8; U29; U28; L27-U). A couple of lecturers further noted a decline in the quality of working relations with management as marked in professional dialogue and input having eroded, such as input on curriculums and truly student-centred learning provision (L3; L4), to some extent stemming from a lack of understanding of professional systems.

There were reports of line managers having become significantly more stretched and busier affecting the support available to lecturers even where working relations were otherwise seen as good (L6; L31-U; L12-1; L12-2; L12-3). Those lecturers with experience of or with line management responsibilities at that time commented on the difficulties of working across campuses, in particular in terms of team cohesion and fewer members of line management staff having to carry out equal or larger workloads (L1; L9; L10; L19; U21; U29; U22). There appear to be wider issues with the line management role and recruiting into it which was acknowledged by HR34. This may explain instances suggesting some higher degree of turnover at that role, the drive to open recruitment up beyond the traditional routes and may be connected to the unfavourable work demands associated with the role (L19; L24 L25; L31-U). From the point of view of senior management (HR18; HR35; P33; P32) it was felt that the industrial dispute had upset what they saw as previously more harmonious relations with their staff.

Taking into account the psychosocial demands associated with managerial behaviour across all levels described under Section 7.2.2. and disruption of previously functional, more harmonious relations with management, this suggests that not only has managerial support as a social resource decreased for most lecturer respondent, this has been connected to an

increase in psychosocial demands which is arguably further compounded in cases where managers do not share the same professional background and therefore understanding of the work.

Second only to task significance and contact with students as (social) job resources of central importance to FE lecturer and union respondents were supportive relations with colleagues. The majority of FE lecturer and union respondents detailed the importance of how their colleagues had provided either or both emotional or instrumental support in coping with job demands in FE lecturing. Examples included colleagues teaching at lower levels associated with smaller marking loads helping a colleague teaching at the highest (HND) level with this (U8) or in socialising, providing opportunities to vent frustrations, but also other wellbeing support in, for instance, doing breathing exercises together to calm nerves (L19). Several lecturers considered rapport and interaction with colleagues as connected to maintenance of standards and quality in teaching/education illustrating the social dimension therein, for example:

*“Most of us can't pick a curriculum team out of a line-up because we were now spread across- The actual discussions that used to happen locally become impossible and the time to meet is even more difficult. That has had an implication on the teaching process itself and on the standard of the curriculum.” (U15)*

At all main fieldwork colleges, there were reports of previously positive, functional team working practices (such as internal verification/quality systems) and/or simply the frequency of social contact having negatively been affected by the college mergers and reorganisation. The latter social contact concerned both formal meetings and informal opportunities to socialise, for instance, over lunch. Several respondents expressed frustration that no best practice evaluation or adequate planning had been carried out prior to merger so to preserve functioning internal quality systems (L1; L2; L4; L3; U5; L31; L30-U; U20; U21; L11; U15). This was further aggravated



where colleagues with significant expertise had left or (as well as teams themselves) were spread across campuses. Several lecturers also discussed (potential) feelings of not knowing where (or to whom) to turn for help as a result of work teams being torn apart or reshuffled (L13-1; L13-2; L13-3; U22).

The industrial action to a few respondents further had threatened a sense of social cohesion between lecturers between those who had broken the strike and those out on the picket lines (U16; L13-1; L13-2; L13-3; L14), while a further few lecturers felt that reliance on temporary staff had undermined a sense of social cohesion and functional collegial work practices (L19; L31-U; L26; L27-U; L23).

*Professional values and experiences of prosocial job characteristics as job resources: Task significance and contact with students*

Prosocial motives corresponding to the perceived prosocial characteristics of FE lecturing jobs were a significant draw factor into the profession and such prosocial characteristics of work of most central importance.

To all lecturer and union respondents, interactions with students and being able to positively affect them were the most significant positive aspects of their work which underpinned their ability to cope with demanding aspects of work, willingness to remain, and fostered positive experiences of work and attitudes to work. Although this was constrained by the changes the sector and FE lecturing jobs had experienced, to most in some, if yet reduced, ways there still was a sense of FE lecturing jobs as providing some of these benefits, such as the opportunity to spend quality teaching time with students in classrooms or seeing individual breakthroughs in terms of understanding.

A lecturer commented:

*“...you can always make a difference at the individual level [...] that doesn't have to be particularly constrained by the organisation”  
(L23)*

However, cuts under austerity not just to the FE sector but also to wider public services, the effects of reform to FE colleges (cumulatively of previous waves of reform and the latest set thereof) increasingly limited the extent to which a proportion of lecturer and union respondents perceived the characteristics of their jobs to offer fulfilment of prosocial motives, also when considered in the context of professional values, as Section 7.2.2. discussed. Both aspects of the job around contact with students (as the key beneficiaries of FE lecturers' work) and, interdependently, aspects around the impact the work allowed to have on students and the wider public had somewhat changed, come under strain or were at threat of being diminished.

As regards aspects of the FE lecturing job around contact with students, several reform and austerity driven factors somewhat negatively impacted this. Proposed (at the time of fieldwork) or recent changes in these aspects of FE lecturers' contact with students were to most lecturer and union respondents (inter-dynamically) connected to or perceived as a threat to the extent to which they offered to exert a positive impact on students in line with professional prosocial values. A lecturer reflected on barriers to student attainment in terms of availability of wider learning support:

*“...if the students are achieving, I feel like I am achieving, you know. But I suppose there's got to be support mechanisms in place to help students achieve and sometimes they're not always there in terms of like learners' services are actually, like, they're very overworked and their workload at the moment is enormous” (L4)*

Taking the above arguments together, the purpose of FE colleges as places of second chances was to some extent perceived to have deteriorated or

under threat of such a (further) decline. Reduction of ‘unnecessary duplication’ in courses offered across several campuses had, as several participants pointed out (L2; U22; U28; U29; P32), reduced opportunities to attend in particular for learners from highly deprived backgrounds lacking the financial resources to pay for travel and for mothers with childcare responsibilities unable to travel far. A focus on younger age brackets better able to attend college fulltime (for whom provision of education thus is cheaper), according to several lecturer and union participants (as well as P32), had seen reductions in part-time courses offered at several main fieldwork colleges as well as cuts to courses for students with (learning) disabilities or other additional support needs. A lecturer reflected:

*“On one hand, you have these policies of imposing draconian, you know, cuts on people and so on and so forth. On the other hand, you give them the illusion of social mobility. So I find myself trying to reconcile those differences” (L24)*

The pressures on recruitment of certain numbers of students onto courses which as a result were, reportedly by around a third of lecturer and union participants, somewhat less interested, ready to study or generally suited to the course in combination with the above affected the extent to which under these circumstances a wider proportion of lecturer and union respondents perceived their jobs to offer a sense of being able to have a positive impact on beneficiaries in terms of FE colleges as places of second chances. This reduced task significance is evident in the account given by a ‘dual-respondent’:

*“...the college's strategy is to get overflow in the classes and then wait for the weaker students to drop out. We don't say that, but that is what they're doing. That is one of the great shames because further education is a second chance for a lot of students who are not that confident and educational” (L30-U)*

More broadly, however, aside of the above encroachment on the extent to which the job offered a sense of task significance, contact with learners was

a central professional job resource to FE lecturers. Prosocial job characteristics in FE lecturing offered potential for positive, satisfying work experiences in seeing learners achieve (whatever this meant for them individually) and grow, to improve their socioeconomic positions which ultimately was seen as connected as benefitting communities. Positive experiences thereof provided a means of coping with some demanding aspects of the job to several lecturer and union participants, such as some of the quantitative demands of the job, and underpinning the desire to remain in a job offering such potential satisfaction of prosocial motives to reduce social inequalities, grant second chances and potential for personal transformation.

### 7.3.3. Intrinsic job resources in FE lecturing: Autonomy

As the previous sections have highlighted, while various forms of control have been a feature of working in FE lecturing since preceding waves of public sector reform, the changes to accounting mechanisms and associated increases in bureaucratic burdens of reporting mechanisms as a result of the reclassification of colleges as public bodies (P32; P33), the challenges associated with the interdynamic of the set up of performance management and funding systems in conjunction with those associated with placing increased emphasis on fulltime teenage learners, and cold fiscal climate could be seen as putting pressure on the scope of FE lecturers' professional autonomy. Principal P32 explained that as a result of how tight the colleges financial situations had become, even expenditures of as little as £500 needed to be approved at head of faculty level so to control and monitor spending.

While autonomy in terms of the scheduling of the work (i.e. timetabling) may have never been or only to lesser degree operational in FE lecturing at the

individual lecturer-level, the data suggests further encroachments on autonomy in terms of the evaluative standards of the quality of work as well as disruptions to aspects of intra-professional processes within these (as detailed under Section 7.2.2.). Autonomy in the methods of work appears to have remained the most unscathed by reform-driven changes aspect of work in FE lecturing in comparison, but concessions across the sample therein or limitations arising out of other domains of the FE lecturing environment could be noted.

Pressures in terms of, for instance, student completion and progression rates (see Section 7.2.2.) could be seen to have brought into question lecturers' concern for quality in the process (teaching) in suggesting that instead quality can be measured in terms of the outcomes of professional work, i.e. increasing pass rates. While the quality of the processes is monitored internally in peer review (internal verification) and externally by the SQA which would most likely comprise external verifiers who are also peers or other subject experts closely related to the respective discipline to be verified or set standards for, government 'outcomes' translating into PIs formulate what they would consider quality in the outcome ('product') of professional work. This would effectively equate quality in processes ('service delivery') with certain outcomes. Consequently, the professional standards per se have largely remained unchanged from systems relying greatly on professional, peer input, however, managerial and, by the same token, funding related pressures have to some extent challenged professional autonomy in deciding the work methods and in evaluating quality therein (such as in terms of their appropriateness and whether these maintain certain standards).

There was managerial pressure to achieve certain pass rates (or essentially no fails), including additional effort to be spent on remediation or resits, intense scrutiny to explain the cause of a student's poor performance or justify the myriad ways in which a lecturer was expected to have helped a student over the line to prevent them from failing a unit or course and why

nonetheless a student's quality of work was poor and did not meet the standard or as it had been put to L26 in regard to a failing student essay "*We see that it's poor. Why?*", challenged professional autonomy. Alongside an awareness of the threat of courses not going ahead or being timetabled differently (e.g. at lower SQCF levels or unfavourable times) and therefore implied threat of job or income (status) insecurity this could be seen as challenging lecturers' professional competence in delivering quality in the learning process (to choose appropriate methods of work) where students had failed. A lecturer explained:

*"...as one head of school told me [...] 'a student can never be wrong, it's-' and 'a student can never fail, it's a lecturer letting the student fail.'" (L19)*

In a sense, this autonomy on the surface still rested with lecturers as it was still lecturers as professionals deciding the methods and evaluating the quality of their work up to the point of pressure to grant remedial lessons or resits beyond what they thought appropriate in terms of their professional judgement. In effect, lecturers' professional autonomy then appears somewhat potentially compromised by the psychosocial demands of poor managerial behaviour or the more implicit threats of job status insecurity. As a lecturer explained:

*"I do have more autonomy here than I had in [my previous job], for sure. That autonomy must still produce the results that they expect, which are unrealistic. That's the trade off." (L26)*

Moreover, the extent to which evaluative professional standards were maintained in peer review, such as systems for internal verification, had across several fieldwork colleges been affected by reductions in (experienced) staff, disruption of teams through multi-campus working as a result of mergers, and a lack of best practice assessments to identify which systems to maintain. A couple of participants had seen their remit and

influence on quality systems reduced, including quality forums for peer exchange they previously would have attended (L3; U20). Several lecturers expressed that standards had dropped, internal verification processes disrupted and that consistency across peers had not been maintained as a result of the effects on team working of being spread across multiple campuses. A lecturer explained:

*“...quality standards have slipped somewhat. [...] So that there’s consistency across the board [...] that everybody is aware of the criteria and what students need to do to reach that to pass” (L4)*

Yet, as far as autonomy in the work methods was concerned, this was where a significant proportion of lecturers still indicated to enjoy the largest amount of freedom, if yet some of this was again constrained by financial resources. Several lecturers also commented on a desire to use various teaching equipment and technology which, however, was affected by resource constraints, such as limited or dated amounts of equipment available or access to teaching resources, including printing facilities and stationary (L2; L3; L4; U15; L26; L23; 24; 25; L27-U; U8; L19; U22 U28; U29; L30-U; L6; U22). A third of lecturers indicated to particularly enjoy this side to their job, several stating that they felt encouraged by their management or generally within their college to leverage this autonomy. To these lecturers, this meant being able to exert creativity in devising engaging learning experiences, also in how technology was used, innovating and freedom to teach how they saw best fit to achieve specific learning outcomes.

*“I think that people can exercise a lot of autonomy in this organisation because ultimately you run your own classroom.” (L23)*

## 7.4. Positive or negative individual job outcomes: Experiences of the professional values and JD-R dynamic for FE lecturers

### *Negative individual job outcomes of the JD-R and professional values dynamic: Excessive stress, ill-health, sickness absence/presenteeism and intentions to leave*

The intensity of work in FE lecturing traditionally inevitably had its 'peaks and troughs' (P32; U15; U16; U20; U21; L31-U; HR35) but increasing workloads, associated extensions of working time and intensifying psychosocial demands appear to have to a large extent diminished opportunities for recovery. Excessive stress levels, increasing frustration and lower morale were widely reported across the FE sample and were seen as connected to various ill-health/negative wellbeing outcomes. The majority of lecturer and union participants indicated to either experience low morale, unhappiness, frustration or a sense of discontent themselves, to have noted these among colleagues or both. While principal P32 quipped that teaching "*[s]taff morale has been falling since Socrates*", they saw budgetary constraints and performance pressures as legitimate sources of discontent:

*"The reality of it is, yes, there are things for people to be unhappy about [...] it's about funding, it's about government expectations, about funding council expectations – I can't do anything about that."* (P32)

The majority of lecturer and union participants disclosed either experiencing high levels of stress themselves, being aware of reports from colleagues indicating to experience high levels of stress or both. This applied to both lecturer and union respondents from merged as well as non-merged colleges. However, as has been suggested, while it was in the nature of FE lecturing to see the intensity of work fluctuate over the course of the



academic year and to ‘do over and above’ for students anyways (L7), as some respondents had pointed out, the preceding analysis of quantitative and qualitative job demands would suggest that it was increases in workload in conflict with lecturers’ professional values around standards and quality which had the most significant negative effect on stress levels. Further sources of high stress cited, alongside workloads and a sense of role conflict, were other psychosocial demands, such as expectations around the job by students but also management, managerial behaviour, but also for most lecturer and union participants significantly a concern for students and delivering the best outcomes for them which reforms to the sector were seen to adversely affect. A lecturer detailed this:

*“I love my students. I’m passionate about my students but my job role’s become less engaging definitely because you don’t have the resources. [...] But there’s times where [...] I’d been crying recently [...] so it’s just sheer frustration.” (L3)*

The ill-health outcomes of excessive stress levels manifested in terms of physical and mental ill-health. The majority of lecturer and union participants indicated that physical and mental ill-health were prevalent across the teaching workforce (19 out of 32 participants, i.e. around two thirds of participants). Examples included mental break downs, lecturers crying at work or at union meetings and conferences, anxiety and depression (L3; L19; U8; U28; U29; U21; L30-U). In two colleges, there were reports of hospitalisations as a result of the physical ill-health manifestations of excessive job demands and associated stress-levels (U29; L14).

A participant detailed stress levels boiling so high, several colleagues had to be taken to hospital by ambulance in the course of an academic year:

*“...the last couple of years, the amount of members of staff that [...] had to be taken away by an ambulance. There's a joke in the staffroom about the photocopiers because this is normally where these things happen. You've gone up to use a photocopier that doesn't work and the next thing someone is like "Oh!!" collapsing.” (L14)*

Just over half of lecturer and union participants (17 out of 32) had an awareness of and examples of sickness absence levels among lecturer colleagues. An example of the prevalence of psychosocial demand (bullying) induced sickness absence in that college related to nearly a whole section taking sickness absence as a result of issues with their line manager (U8). Another example of how common stress-related sickness absence was is that of a lecturer who had been brought in as a zero-hours ‘bank’ member of staff to cover stress-related sickness absence who disclosed working near fulltime hours as a result of this being so endemic.

Two HR respondents indicated that sickness absence levels were higher than the national average across the education sector of 3.9%; respectively 5% at HR34's and 4.4% at HR18's college. HR34 indicated that their strategy to reduce sickness absence would focus on prevention. In another college, sickness absence management had undergone a ‘reframing’ as “positive attendance” management policies the union branch and HR had negotiated (U5).

A union participant indicated that lecturers were reluctant to specify the reasons for their sickness absence as stress or mental health problems rather than the physical manifestations of these (U16), whereas another respondent described a sense of fear among his colleagues around taking sick leave for being seen as weak:

*“But there’s also lots of examples of long term absence through stress and mental health issues amongst lecturers. [...] Again, people are reluctant to take time off, because they don’t want to be seen as a weak member of their team.” (L30-U)*

This might also be reflected in some, if yet minor, degree of dismissal of experiencing stress or strain or to prefer referring to the negative effects of job demands or effects of the interplay of characteristics of work as extremely ‘frustrating’ (L3; L7; L13-1; L13-3). L7, who had a decade earlier come into FE lecturing from being self-employed, was highly dismissive of claims by his colleagues to experience work-related stress:

*“...a lot of people in teaching and education have not had a real job before. They’re institutionalised, right? They don’t know what it’s like to have to work a day’s work” (L7)*

Rather than taking time off sick, however, most conversations with lecturers (and union participants) revealed widespread presenteeism which, according to L6 and L30-U, further compounded incidence of illness by lecturers passing infections on in staff rooms. As well as a matter of personal pride according to a few lecturers (L6; L17-U) or an *“attitude of ‘I’ll go to my work, get on with it’”* among a team (L10), a share of FE respondents reported coming into work sick out of concern for their students and colleagues or of colleagues doing so (L4; L6; L10; L17-U; U15; L19; L30-U). Conscious of their colleagues’ already overly stretched workloads, these lecturers indicated that to cover classes represented a significant amount of additional work as well as knowing that either a lack of capacity meant that none of their colleagues could cover their classes and that students overall would miss out

on (good quality, incl. well prepared) learning. The significant pressures to attend are illustrated at hand of the example of a lecturer explaining to have come in to work even with a sick note:

*“I was signed off by my doctor 3 weeks ago and I just didn’t submit the sick note cause I knew that if I did submit it that cause of that time of the year my HNDs would fail cause no one would take them over.” (L19)*

While inevitably college regionalisation had seen changes to the size and composition of FE’s workforce, the attractiveness to remain for those in post following the reforms to the sector in preceding years had declined, was at breaking point or under threat for most lecturer and union respondents. There were accounts of lecturers still leaving, even outwith voluntary severance schemes or without jobs to go to, taking or contemplating early retirement or enquiring about VS schemes (U8; U15; L27-U; U20; U21; U28; U29; L30-U). Reasons cited were stress-related ill-health, a profound dissatisfaction with changes to the job or sector as a whole and poor treatment by management. Several lecturers were actively planning their exit (L24; L25; L14; L23), while L6 deliberated that the reason for colleagues to remain was a lack of attractive options. As L14 explained, as well as excessive demands,

*“Sometimes I think, and a lot of people I think, you want to jump before you’re pushed.”*

Several participants also questioned whether, as a result of the previously described pressures, FE lecturing was indeed still a long term career that could be pursued longer term into older age (L6; U21; L31-U), with a couple of those considering it a ‘burnout job’ (L6; U21) and one lecturer having suffered from burnout in promoted post (L19).

Another bundle of lecturer respondents revealed to have considered leaving and several lecturers stating that they would be on the cusp of doing so should working conditions, particularly holidays alongside contact time, or

ways of working with students allowing to make a difference deteriorate (L13-1; L13-2; L13-3; L19; U21; L26; L6; L31-U). There were numerous accounts by union and lecturer participants of colleagues who had left or were expressing a desire to leave (U22; U15; L11; L9; L10; L23; L14; U21; U20; L27-U; U8; L19; L30-U; U28; U29; L6). Having joined the college and lecturing profession somewhat just over a decade ago, L27-U described being the second longest serving member in his department following several rounds of VS. The desire among lecturers to leave was so prevalent, the union in one main fieldwork college pleaded management to change the way in which VS schemes were operated so to stop the drain on highly experienced, qualified lecturers. Concerns related to the contractual terms of staff brought in to cover those who had left following VS and expertise to teach certain subject areas (L27-U; U8; U22; L26; U28; U29). A few FE participants indicated to be holding out until their close retirement (L13-2; L27-U).

In contrast to this trend in FE lecturer respondents considering leaving voluntarily are examples of lecturers being made to leave who did not want to leave, either through effectively 'in-'voluntary severance as a result of reductions in credit targets or constructive dismissal (U16, U28, U29; L30-U; L11; L31-U). There was also a concern around job loss at collegel in which staff had particular awareness of the specific credit targets to be met or else there would be job losses, a sense that the cost of national bargaining threatened a loss of lecturing positions and a concern as being seen to be speaking out. However, participants in other colleges even where jobs were perceived to have become insecure perhaps felt less threatened by this as a result of seeing other options available or felt that knowing what strenuous working conditions would be left behind mitigated negative feelings about the threat of job loss to some extent (L13-3; L13-2; L19; U20; U21; L31-U; L30-U).

A lecturer reflected on how intense experiences of stress at times led to a desire to quit:

*“I’ve said it to hundreds of folks during the years that I’ve been so stressed and said ‘You know, I’m quitting.’ It gets so intense at times, especially at the start of the year when the class sizes are huge.” (L11)*

A couple of lecturers indicated that the job was in their minds still less stressful than what they had been doing previously (L7; L23), while a further few respondents saw (at least some of) their conditions of employment as yet more favourable than those found in the private sector (L17-U; U5). This was contrasted with the views of other lecturers in electrical, mechanical and automotive engineering and accountancy or ICT subjects who felt that, not least in terms of pay, but also in terms of treatment by management, conditions of employment were more favourable in industry than in Scottish FE colleges, such that if class contact time increased, holidays decreased and other rewarding aspects of the job were eroded, namely to have a positive impact on students and to deliver quality learning, there came a point at which staying to them or their colleagues was no longer ‘worth it’ (L13-1; L13-3; L13-2; U20; U21; L19).

## 7.5. Chapter conclusion

Professional values were a central thread running through the findings of the FE case study. These findings are presented in this chapter in relation to changes in and experiences of working conditions. Findings from the FE case study revealed how a cold fiscal climate had led to significant increases in quantitative job demands. In addition, the nature of these increases in quantitative job demands as well as current and preceding reorganisation measures the sector had undergone were associated with increasing qualitative job demands. While overall job resources in FE lecturing had come under strain in this environment, one improvement that could be noted was the reintroduction of collective bargaining to the sector at the national (Scottish) level which, however, was not without caveats. Prosocial job characteristics, however, were identified as of central importance. The increasing job demands and declining job resources were widely reported to have resulted in detrimental individual outcomes, such as excessive stress levels and issues relating to sickness absence. Having presented findings from both empirical case studies in this and the preceding Chapter 6, this allows identifying several conceptual implications and contributions that can be made.

## *Chapter 8. Discussion and conclusions*

The central purpose of this chapter is to present the research contributions. The first part of the chapter begins by briefly restating the research problem. Subsequently, a short cross-case synthesis of findings from the empirical case studies including a mapping of the public sector reform context is presented. The following, substantive part of the chapter reviews the conceptual propositions drawn from evaluating the empirical elements of both case studies against the conceptual framework, in relation to the four research questions. The research questions, presented at the end of Chapter 4, were structured to reflect the multiple levels contained within the analytic framework. A descending order through these levels provides a helpful logic for structuring the subsections in this chapter. This starts at macro-level reform and the connected fiscal policy context in which public sector work and employment are embedded. Against this context, profession level influences (professional values as encapsulated in shared identities) on the experience of working conditions, spanning characteristics of work and employment as job demands and resources, are examined. Individual experiences of this interdynamic are discussed in relation to individual job outcomes. These relations are subsequently evaluated in a cross-occupational comparison. Based on the conceptual implications identified in addressing each research question, the theoretical and empirical contributions are presented in the penultimate section. The chapter concludes by highlighting the study's limitations and areas for future research.

### 8.1. Revisiting the research problem

The thesis started with the observation that public sector reform and fiscal retrenchment under austerity presented a renewed decline in, or challenge



to, the degree to which working conditions (characteristics of work and employment) in public service could be seen as favourable. In cuts to public expenditure, a core target of austerity measures concerned characteristics of employment in public service (Bach, 2019). These are typically supplemented by a variety of reorganisation measures to achieve 'efficiency' gains and facilitate rationalisation of public expenditure through changes in aspects of work organisation (OECD, 2011a; Westgaard and Winkel, 2011; Eurofound, 2012a, 2015; Vaughan-Whitehead, 2013). It was argued that for public service professions, experiences of such changes to working conditions might be shaped by how they resonate with professional values.

Moreover, job demands cannot be fully understood without acknowledging that, for the vast majority of individuals, selling their labour power is necessary to subsist (Reed, 1997). Consequently, job demands are shaped by capital seeking to extract more use value from labour or, in a public sector context, by ideological pressures to minimise expenditure on the state (Blyth, 2013, especially chapters 4 and 5) and thus make 'more with less' (OECD, 2012). This may create antagonism with perceptions of whether effort is adequately compensated for in terms of job resources, such as financial rewards, social rewards (e.g. appreciation or career opportunities) and thus shaping individual experiences of job demands (Siegrist, 1996; Zapf *et al.*, 2013; Granter *et al.*, 2019).

The research has examined the interdynamic between (changes in) working conditions (i.e. characteristics of work and employment) in connection to multi-level reorganisation (driven by public sector reform and austerity) to shape professional experiences thereof. Rather than evaluating to what extent and how public sector reorganisation along neoliberal, managerial logics has succeeded in displacing or fusing with professional logics, this research has focused on professional experiences of (interrelated changes in) working conditions and their individual outcomes. This has considered the role played by professional values to provide a better understanding of how

characteristics of work and employment are evaluated as better or worse by public service professionals. Prior research has focused on the interplay of professional identity and values with (reform-driven changes in) work practices (Ackroyd, Kirkpatrick and Walker, 2007; Wright, Irving and Selvan Thevatas, 2020; Chen and Reay, 2021; Chen, Currie and McGivern, 2021), as well as on professionalisation and occupational closure (namely, occupational self-regulation) in relation to general dimensions of job quality. These concerned higher wages; job security; more-favourable intrinsic job qualities such as task autonomy, discretion and complexity; and lower work intensity (e.g. Anderson and Warhurst, 2019; Williams and Koumenta, 2020). Traditionally, professionalised occupations were considered to enjoy more favourable conditions of work and employment, i.e. as offering ‘good jobs’ (Hardering, 2020). Debates centring on the degree of blending between managerial/professional work practices and control tend to neglect that reorganisation of professional work has consequences not only in terms of the quality of conditions of employment in public service jobs, but also in terms of the sources of meaning, the potential for experiencing professional work as intrinsically satisfying and the overall intrinsic qualities of professional jobs (Hardering, 2020; Williams and Koumenta, 2020). As Spillman and Brophy (2018, pp. 155–156, based on Mills, 1940) have argued, professionalism as a “‘vocabulary of motive’ endow[s] ‘professional’ work with meaning”. As this research has illustrated, this extends to how professional work (and employment) are experienced, such as whether intensity in work is experienced more positively or negatively, which in turn is connected to wider wellbeing outcomes.

This study contributes to debates on the quality of work and employment in professional public service occupations in the light of public sector reorganisation. It advances a more nuanced understanding of how professionals in public service experience reform- and austerity-driven changes in work and employment. This has revealed how professional values shape what is seen as positive or negative therein, offering a more

detailed explanation beyond (and in addition to) the ‘more is better’ assumptions in terms of, e.g. financial rewards and autonomy, which have typically been considered a key aim or benefit of efforts to professionalise (Macdonald, 1995; Alvesson, 2013; Brock, Leblebici and Muzio, 2014). This has highlighted the social nature of experiences of work (e.g. Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978; Granter *et al.*, 2019) which in this research was reflected in tending to professional values and a proposed reconceptualisation of job demands and social job resources in public service professional jobs. This reconceptualisation of working conditions was sensitive to the multiple levels at which the several dimensions of these social job resources may be located and the distinct sources of work intensity in public service professional jobs, to account for the particular psychosocial demands emanating from tensions between professional values and the ideology underpinning public service reform measures. The subsequent sections elaborate on these contributions in addressing the research questions through empirical findings against the conceptual framework and the conceptual implications that can be derived from this process. Following this, further theoretical contributions to organisational behaviour literatures, as well as empirical contributions and the practical implications identified from this discussion, are presented.

## 8.2. Addressing the research questions: Conceptual implications

The following section addresses the four research questions identified at the end of Chapter 4 by contrasting key empirical findings against the literatures from which the conceptual framework has drawn and in so doing, several conceptual implications of the research are identified. These sections, in order, examine: How neoliberal public sector reform under austerity has changed characteristics of work and employment (working conditions) within the two sectors under study (from each of which one public-sector occupation

was selected); how occupational values influence the way that working conditions are experienced, and finally; how professional values interact with the dynamics of working conditions in regard to individual outcomes.

### 8.2.1. The effects of the public sector reform context on work and employment in FRS and FE in Scotland

The first research question asked how characteristics of work and employment had changed across occupational contexts as a result of public sector reforms under austerity. This sought to discern how such reforms had transformed working conditions in public service in the two case studies; considered against the sampling logic presented in Chapter 5 and through the heuristic lens presented in Chapter 2 for the analysis of the process of neoliberalisation. This approach rests on the analytical dimensions represented by the principles of 'economy', 'efficiency', and 'effectiveness' in public sector reform approaches. Under austerity, such reform approaches are driven by the ideological belief in cuts to public expenditure as a response to economic crises being beneficial; and against a context of prior rounds of budgetary cuts to public services (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017, pp. 215–216).

The following section discusses the core dynamics between these reform measures and between characteristics of work and employment, in comparison between the two cases. Appendix B summarises and compares the contextual backdrop to these cases.

The findings illustrate the distinctive character of public sector reform approaches under the phase of austerity as being, first and foremost, driven by the logic of fiscal retrenchment in public expenditure as the key rationale.

This conforms with observations drawn by scholars in public administration (PA) literatures (Bach, 2016), as also detailed in Chapter 2. Although set in the Scottish context where government discourse around austerity-driven public sector reform sought to differentiate itself from that of Westminster's Conservative-led Coalition Government (see, for example, Scottish Government, 2011b), the material cuts imposed by Westminster in terms of reduced budgets nevertheless became the underlying rationale for reform measures. However, the findings from the two cases also highlight how the nature of work characterising a sector and occupation, in combination with collective interest representation arrangements, can shape how and where public expenditure cuts can be effected through public sector reform. In accord with Bach (2019), at the most direct level of influence, austerity measures have affected characteristics of employment in public service.

### *The logic of 'economy' in Scottish FE and FRS reform*

In regard to reform measures following the principle of 'economy' as pertaining to numerical cuts and changes, the biggest savings in both case studies were realised through reductions to overall frontline staff (Appendix B). The Scottish Government had instructed public organisations not to implement compulsory redundancies, which to may to some degree have shaped the mix of viable reform measures targeted at reducing public sector workforce compensation across the two cases.

While the findings presented in this thesis give a nuanced account of the interdependency of reform measures following the logic of the three 'Es' (Appendix B and Chapters 6 and 7), arguably there was greater scope for reducing the size of the lecturer workforce in FE colleges compared to that of firefighters. This is also reflected in voluntary severances being implemented as a measure for shrinking the size of the FE workforce; and lecturers in particular, whereby eliminating 'duplication' of FE provision was to be

effected through college mergers into 'regions'. In comparison, the FRS's less direct approach to headcount reductions relied on recruitment freezes for firefighters and non-replacement of retirees, further facilitated through a leaner shift roster for operational firefighters. Both sets of reform measures are summarised in Appendix B.

An explanation for the possibility to enact more direct cuts to 'frontline' staff in the FRS compared to FE arguably resides in the nature of work being emergency work and thus risk-based staffing requirements at the frontline. This may further connect to differences in whether or not a casualization of the workforce is feasible as a means to reduce workforce-related expenditure (Hermann, 2014) in resonance with, for example, seasonal fluctuations. Contractual terms surrounding 'contingent' workforce arrangements differ between FRS and FE colleges. The needs of high-reliability organisations, such as the ambulance service (e.g. Saunders and Townsend, 2016) and in this case the FRS, may shape contractual staffing needs. Contingent firefighter (FF) staffing needs are regulated through more specific, less casualized clauses, such as through the notice period for 'orange days' or the 'retained duty system'. FE colleges, in contrast, have the ability to draw on 'bank' lecturing staff, including some working under zero-hours contracts. FE union and lecturer participants suspected an increase in colleges' reliance on such 'bank' staff.

As far as pay changes for the sector as a whole were concerned, FE lecturers, having regained the right to collective bargaining at the Scottish level in 2013, arguably fared better compared to the pay freezes or below-inflation uplifts FFs had received, for whom the FBU negotiates at UK level. However, the deal for unpromoted lecturer's pay to be uplifted to 'best practice' as part of the wider harmonisation of terms and conditions in 2017 only followed the culmination of a yearlong dispute into an escalating pattern of industrial action over several weeks in the form of strikes with subsequent intervention by the Scottish Government appointing a mediating QC and

providing additional funds. This in effect absorbed the savings made through reductions in staff under college mergers and subsequent continuation of the same funding levels by the SFC (Scottish Funding Council) but in exchange for increased numbers of credits to be delivered (Audit Scotland, 2018a). The latter could be seen to have entailed increases in class sizes, accompanied by added student retention and attainment pressures, as tied to these funding provisions. As such, gains in terms of FE lecturer pay harmonisation came at some expense to other working conditions for FE lecturers. In comparison, FFs were arguably more, if not completely, sheltered from certain workload increases owing to the risk inherent to the nature of their work and surrounding framework agreements for negotiations with the FBU.

In this sense, the distinctive of nature of work, alongside industrial relations, appeared to shape the means and scale of workforce cuts. The unilateral implementation of low or no pay increases for FFs conforms with observations made more widely across the UK (e.g. Bach and Stroleny, 2014), but that is not to say that lecturers' pay uplift to 'best practice' came without concessions elsewhere, such as in work intensity. Appendix B offers a coarse overview of pay gains made by lecturers at core fieldwork sites compared to 'worst practice' in the FE sector.

### *The logic of 'efficiency' in Scottish FE and FRS reform*

The two case studies were characterised by having undergone organisational restructuring in the form of mergers and hence exemplify those reform measures attempting to further reduce the 'production costs' of public service delivery whereby risk and/or decades of preceding cuts limited the scope of what remained possible to be cut. Thus, it was anticipated that the effects of structural reorganisation would be particularly pronounced. However, findings across the case studies suggested that it was compounding effects of the

cold fiscal climate which presented key issues at the frontline. A possible explanation for the available options for reform measures may be the above-detailed considerations surrounding the influence of the nature of work, and to a lesser degree (as far as FFs are concerned), industrial relations. Reorganisation measures were targeted at various levels in a supplementary manner; namely at sector, work organisation, to job-role levels (see Appendix B). The nature of task expansions between the two occupations differed notably. The broadening of job roles of FFs into other suitable areas, in contrast to increases in the same nature of tasks affecting FE lecturers, arguably depended on the nature of work and associated risks in considering what type of role expansion was deemed possible.

### *The logic of 'effectiveness' in Scottish FE and FRS reform*

#### *Oversight arrangements in support of 'effectiveness': Managerialism, performance monitoring, and funding mechanisms*

Public sector reforms which have characterised the two case studies presented in this thesis illustrate what has been described as a paradox of New Public Management (Hoggett, 1996; Diefenbach, 2009). This paradox concerns the tendency for public sector reforms to introduce or enhance greater centralisation of control over strategic decisions, especially financial control, while maintaining (or enhancing) operational devolution. Particularly in a cold fiscal climate, the overarching financial pressures and therefore greater central assertion of fiscal control, were anticipated to be particularly pronounced (European Commission, 2013, p. 141). Both case studies provided evidence of such measures increasing centralisation of strategic control (see Appendix B). Funding-based pressures overseen and enforced through performance management were arguably more-directly negative in the FE case study (in which punitive clauses for 'underperformance' could



lead to funding being 'clawed back'), thus presenting a threat to FE lecturers' job (status) security.

A similarity can also be observed across the two case studies with regards a strengthening of the 'management function' in oversight arrangements. In particular, the recruitment of staff into mid- or line-management positions without a background in these sectors is of note. This research also revealed an increase in adverse managerial behaviour, in line with prior findings that reorganisation measures and performance monitoring under tightened managerial control can be associated with incidents of bullying and negative managerial behaviour (Eurofound, 2012a; van der Kolk, ter Bogt and van Veen-Dirks, 2015).

*Supporting 'effectiveness' through the individualisation of service user relations and collectivities*

In the case of FE, the intention behind 'college mergers' to eradicate 'unnecessary competition' (Scottish Government, 2011a) connects to the primacy of effecting financial savings (yet appears to have overestimated the extent to which there in effect was 'competition' for students) while funding arrangements remained firmly ingrained in the ideology of individualised FE provision under which students are able to choose, much as customers would. This conforms to expectations around the individualising objectives of neoliberal reform noted in wider literatures (Crouch, 2009).

In both case studies, the institutional arrangements surrounding collective interest representation were comparatively strong, or even newly strengthened (FE), as a result of (still) high trade union membership levels (FE and FRS). As the above discussion highlighted, this is not without caveats, though it may have provided some protection against yet harsher cuts. There further remains the question as to what extent the reintroduction

of collective bargaining at the Scottish level in FE was a concession to appease the unions, i.e. as a 'carrot' (P33) to push through its college merger agenda. These findings are reflective of collective-interest-representation arrangements in public service still having remained more favourable in the public over private sector, despite some decline (Glassner, 2010; Gold and Veersma, 2011; European Commission, 2013, p. 11).

Reflecting on Bach and Stroleny's (2013, p. 355) observation, the process of implementing austerity measures may differ depending on historical context, including industrial relations traditions, and nuanced differences in the convictions held in the interpretation of the ideology of neoliberalism of governments "but [that] the measures and consequences have shown less variation", the above discussion underlines sources of differences in such processes, but also several common threads within the case study contexts. The conclusion that this section draws is that while there may be 'variation' in the processes and targets of neoliberal reform, the guiding 'theme' of public expenditure rationalisation has remained (Hood, 1995).

## 8.2.2. Professional values and the significance of reform-driven changes in work and employment in terms of job demands and resources

The second research question asked how, and to what extent, public sector reforms have shaped job demands and resources in the context of professional values. This sought to discern the role of professional values as evaluative standards against which public sector working conditions, or reform-driven changes therein, would be judged. The question was posed in response to calls for a better understanding of when and why characteristics of work and employment come to be experienced more negatively or

positively and as job demands or resources (Webster, Beehr and Love, 2011; Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2013; Schaufeli and Taris, 2014; Searle and Auton, 2015; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; van Veldhoven *et al.*, 2020).

This section examines reform-driven changes in working conditions in terms of when such changes gain significance in being positively or negatively experienced - that is, as job demands or resources - through the lens of their dynamics with professional values. The subsequent sections first consider how value conflict relates to negative experiences of work and employment, which may also run counter to expectation (e.g. characteristics of jobs generally deemed 'good' not being evaluated as such). This is followed by a discussion of how aspects of work and employment, as well as reform driven changes therein, matching professional values may shape the significance of those aspects typically considered more favourable, but also how these can relate to positively experiencing intensity in work. In this manner, conceptual implications adding to a better understanding of influences on and relations of experiences of working conditions and their positive or negative effects can be revealed.

### *Professional value conflict and the significance and negative experiences of changes in intensity in work as job demands*

Rationalising, 'efficiency'-seeking public sector reorganisation measures under the banner of 'doing more with less' (Vaughan-Whitehead, 2013, pp. 8, 36) are generally underpinned by increasing the work effort expended by staff in terms of the amount or pace of work, or time spent working (e.g. Westgaard and Winkel, 2011; Eurofound, 2012a). Unsurprisingly, this is supported by findings from both case studies. Each was associated with greater intensity of work, such as in volume, pace, scope, duration and the psychological effort required.

The findings further provide a detailed account of when (or rather what type of) such increases in work effort were experienced negatively or could on the contrary be experienced positively. This has revealed under what conditions responses diverge from expectation. Whether quantitative increases in work intensity became salient as job demands depended to some degree on whether these were still deemed to lie within the bounds of what was considered 'normal' for each particular nature of work.

Across both case studies, the findings suggested that whether workload increases were seen as more negative or positive depended to some extent on the nature of the increases; in relation to professional values rather than first and foremost their volume. In both case studies, such tasks were viewed negatively if connected to control exerted from outwith the profession, or in ignorance of the realities of working on the frontline and exerted, therefore, by those not perceived qualified to exert such judgement owing to a lack of professional knowledge or experience. Reforms to both sectors had altered the purposes and consequently job requirements of the two occupations under study. This was seen as connected to increasing psychosocial demands, such as role conflict. The prevalence of adverse managerial behaviour across both case studies resonates with findings pointing towards an association between organisational restructuring and incidents of such strained managerial relations (Eurofound, 2015, 2017). This thesis this link to be especially pertinent to professional public service contexts in the light of managerial reforms and potential antagonism with professional values.

The findings in this thesis have expanded on this observation in illustrating the role played by professional values in garnering acceptance of, or objection to, increases or changes in workload. This conforms with findings of other studies concerning work (re-)design (e.g. Kessler, Heron and Dopson, 2015; Chen, Currie and McGivern, 2021). Task increases connected (also) to psychosocial demands, rather than the volume of work exclusively, were on the whole more poorly received. Increases in tasks significantly distant from

core duties (e.g. office-based activities for firefighters) were more problematic, as were tasks for which workers felt ill-equipped (e.g. medical emergencies). Workers also felt that disconnected, novel tasks conflicted with a sense of professional knowledge and experience gained through training which mitigated the extreme demands of the job.

Overall, the empirical findings suggest that professional values help explain the particular nature of job demands posed on public service professions in a reform context. Organisational restructuring has been suggested as being associated with increases in work intensity (quantitative demands), including a higher incidence of formal monitoring through performance-related metrics, and psychosocial demands posed by negative managerial behaviour and otherwise antagonistic social relations in work (e.g. bullying, harassment) (Westgaard and Winkel, 2011; Eurofound, 2012a, p. 64, 2015, p. 96). These observations were mirrored in both case studies. But further, in agreement with calls by Granter *et al.* (2019) to reconceptualise sources of work intensity, the findings also suggested that professional values (and identity) purvey additional sources of work intensity (job demands) which can be observed in a reorganisation context. When or why such intensity in work may be experienced either as positive or negative hence flows from whether the nature of organisational change resonates or conflicts with the frontline's professional values.

The public sector reforms impacting both case studies introduced greater managerialism, and with it the managerialist paradigm's distinct views and attitude of managing by numbers. Against this backdrop, more antagonistic relations with public service professionals would be expected (e.g. Scott, 2008; Diefenbach, 2009; Bach, 2010; Worrall, Mather and Cooper, 2016; McCann and Granter, 2019) to which the findings add support. Overall, across both case studies, professional values (in terms of expertise, knowledge, peer review of the quality of work and professional cohesion in the maintenance of standards) influenced the perceived legitimacy of

management as a source of authority and, ultimately, whether relations were experienced as more positive or negative. Where management was considered not to share such values and expertise, or perceived as having 'betrayed' their peers for self-interested motives, inevitably professional relations with management were negatively experienced.

*Professional value conflict and the significance and negative experiences of changes in material and nonmaterial job rewards as resources*

Arguments presented earlier from the sociology of professions emphasised the value to the worker of extrinsic resources, such as sheltered labour-market positions or material rewards (e.g. Alvesson, 2013). A significantly negative experience of their erosion under austerity's rationalisation of public expenditure (Bach, 2019) could hence have been anticipated and was indeed a manifest outcome of the study. However, without denying the pivotal role played by extrinsic job resources, this thesis paints a more nuanced picture of their significance to public service professionals – in particular, under which conditions such resources might increase or decrease in significance.

Rather than concern for any specific level of financial rewards (pay), material rewards in this study were deemed particularly important in connection to professional values. Namely, whether these offered a sense of professional cohesion among peers in being remunerated and rewarded equally (in terms of pay and pensions); in reflecting a sense of their occupation as socially valued, and as a token of appreciation to public servants who are feeling otherwise under siege from successive reforms (bringing their motives to work into question); as well as being connected to the increasing quantitative work demands these professionals have found themselves subjected to by waves of reform producing an increasingly skewed wage-effort-bargain.

Perceptions of fairness in pay, and therefore the extent to which pay could be seen as favourable or in balance with perceptions of a fair wage-effort-/effort-reward-bargain (Siegrist, 1996; Green, 2006; Guest, 2008) were shaped by professional values. These surrounded a sense of social cohesion and equality among FE lecturers and for firefighters, a sense of societal importance in the skills possessed by the frontline.

While job security as a job resource in public sector employment has arguably declined across these two case studies, instead as a result of the decline in favoured characteristics of work and the continued cold fiscal climate, there was a greater sense of what Gallie *et al.* (2017) refer to as job status insecurity, namely where valued aspects of a job, such as pay, skill, or treatment by (line) management are perceived to be under threat of deterioration.

Rather than work being controlled per se, it was the nature of such control (result-based performance measures rather than quality in the processes of work) and by whom control was exerted (managers with little to no experience of the profession under the present context) that were widely associated with negative experiences. This conforms to arguments presented in sociological literatures (Exworthy, Hyde and McDonald-Kuhne, 2016; Noordegraaf, 2016). To a smaller extent, FF findings also confirmed that autonomy (or being able to exercise discretion) could be viewed negatively where this was associated with significant responsibility (Semmer and Beehr, 2013) and could be punished with disciplinary action.

Findings further highlighted the role of professional values (surrounding knowledge and expertise) as influencing when autonomy could be experienced as negative. In accord with Semmer and Beehr's suggestion (2013) that job resources may invert into being negatively experienced. To firefighters, this concerned some novel work situations demanding FFs exercise discretion, for instance, at incidents which were not traditionally part

of FFs' job roles. These therefore conflicted with FFs' sense of feeling competent; a condition seen as central to normalising the extreme demands of the job.

To FF respondents, training arrangements were a job resource of central importance, not only in their ability to mitigate or normalise the demands posed by the nature of emergency work in physically challenging environments, but also in facilitating valued systems of peer-driven learning and a sense of social cohesion necessitated by the nature of the work. Training arrangements upon entry to the profession had not substantively changed. However, continuous training and development on the job had been impacted by professionalisation efforts, tightened monitoring, and budgetary pressures, either directly through cuts to provision or more indirectly where less time was available for training owing to an intensification of work. These trends and their toll on peer-driven learning caused tensions with FFs' values surrounding the formation system of professional expertise.

### *Professional value match and the significance and positive experiences of changes in material and non-material job rewards as resources*

As was highlighted in Chapter 3, there was some divergence amongst claims regarding assumptions about professional motives across different sociological perspectives (Evetts, 2013, 2018; Ackroyd, 2016; Saks, 2016a). These depended on whether professions placed primary value on the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards that could be gained from occupational closure (or 'market' domination) and control over work organisation, such as greater job security or autonomy, or whether professions indeed genuinely subscribed to prosocial values (beyond the extent to which these can serve as a veneer to maintain the rewards offered through occupational closure). Rather than supporting one such assumption over another, this research



gives a finer-grained account of how these professional values shape perceptions and expectations of working conditions; explaining when and why these gain importance, as well as whether these are positively or negatively evaluated.

In spite of a downward trend in job rewards, some positive developments could be noted. In terms of the significance of job resources, these concern the reinstatement of collective bargaining at the national level in FE in Scotland and subsequent upward harmonisation of pay for the vast majority of FE lecturers; in spite of whether lecturers expressed significant concern for actual pay level rather than, first and foremost, equality between peers.

In FE in particular, the sense of social cohesion offered by collective-interest representation arrangements appeared particularly important, which would connect to arguments concerning professionals valuing such social cohesion among members of their occupation profession (e.g. Hall, 1968; Evetts, 2014; Olakivi and Niska, 2017). This, however, needs to be considered with caution as a result of the characteristics of the sample that comprise a large amount of union members and officials as well as some data having been collected at picket lines and against the backdrop of industrial action surrounding the national harmonisation of terms and conditions. Arguably, the upwards harmonisation in pay for FE lecturers hindered expenditure reductions as an intended outcome of austerity-driven reform measures.

Alongside historical context and recent reorganisation in favour of collective interest representation, professional values surrounding social cohesion further influenced whether importance was placed on this as a social job resource. Findings from the case studies suggested that the social cohesion factor may indeed take precedence in shaping outcomes. In spite of findings suggesting positive influences on working conditions through collective interest representation for firefighters (such as concerning the notice period for 'orange days'), the union's past inefficiency at maintaining a sense of

professional cohesion (and further, its violation in the fallout of the industrial dispute of 2002/3), reduced the perceived significance of collective interest representation as offering a job resource in firefighting.

Professional values also demonstrated potential to shape whether relations with management would be experienced more positively or negatively. Most crucially however, this research points towards the influence and role of professional values in shaping whether prosocial job characteristics, most notably task significance, could be associated with having positive effects.

Rather than rejecting professional references to a notion of altruism (or prosocial motives) as a mere veneer for self-interested ends and as lacking empirical support (Saks, 2010), this research has advanced a finer grained understanding of the centrality of prosocial professional values to experiences of working conditions in public service. More specifically, the study has illustrated how wider professional values underpin interpretations of work practices which were in turn connected to experiences of task significance and, ultimately, satisfying experiences of work (Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd and Walker, 2004a; Dierdorff and Morgeson, 2007; Semmer and Beehr, 2013; Ponnert and Svensson, 2016; Hardering, 2020). Reorganisation measures altering the purposes of, and work roles within, public sector organisations had altered the nature of contact with those beneficiaries associated with professional values, and in turn altered the potential for roles to have a positive impact on values. The findings suggested that professionals' understanding of their occupation's purpose, autonomy in deciding the methods of work and standards therein, and ability to make discretionary judgements supporting the maintenance of professional integrity, underpinned whether contact with beneficiaries was experienced more positively and whether a sense of task significance from work could be gained.

The research further suggested that training as an intrinsic job resource (for firefighters) gained central significance not only in regards to the particular nature of work, but also in terms of whether the characteristics of training arrangements resonated with professional preferences and values (in terms of social cohesion and traditional socialisation processes), hence fostering whether this was positively experienced. Training arrangements not catering to these professional values and preferences were negatively experienced, such as instances in which computer-based training displaced traditional drills-based exercises.

### *Professional value match and the significance and positive experiences of changes in intensity in work*

As the previous discussion highlighted, task increases which were connected to increasing psychosocial demands (rather than the volume of work exclusively) were more likely to be perceived as problematic. Findings from the firefighter case study, however, also revealed that some enlargement of workloads could be viewed in a positive light where this resonated with the understood traditional core purpose of the occupation in terms of 'saving lives', 'helping people' and 'being busy' with emergency response, as well as the work preferences for manual, hands-on, emergency response that had drawn around a third into the occupation. Quantitative increases in work intensity across both cases could be experienced positively where the nature of the increases resonated prosocially positively with professional values, such as giving 'second chances' (FE) or 'saving lives' (FRS). This conforms with literatures which have highlighted positive sources of intensity in work, such as those positively resonating with a profession's sense of its occupational purpose (Bargagliotti, 2012; Dierdorff and Morgeson, 2013; Granter *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, findings from the FE case study illustrated how heavy workloads had traditionally been considered part and parcel of the job at peak times during the academic year, as well as 'going above and beyond'

for students, suggesting that some aspects of workloads could be conceived of as positively experienced or 'normal' up to a certain threshold. Reforms in the context of austerity appeared starkly to have toppled these positive experiences of demands.

### 8.2.3. Individual experiences of professional job demands and resources in public service

The third research question asked how individuals had experienced public sector reforms in terms of the two categories of working conditions and professional values. Analysis focused on how working conditions identified as significant, experienced positively (job resources) or negatively (job demands), were discussed in relation to each other, as well how professional values were discussed in relation to these dynamics between the two dimensions of working conditions; namely (i.e. worsening or mitigating of a positive or negative experience). Lastly, these relations were considered in regard to individual job outcomes such as stress, burnout, or positive wellbeing.

Considering prior arguments concerning professionalization as a means for securing more favourable characteristics of professional work and employment, as well as the antagonistic role of the neoliberal state, this research question was posed with the intention of uncovering the extent to which professional values either mitigated or worsened negative or positive experiences of working conditions - and how these manifested in individual outcomes.

As regards individual professional experiences of working conditions in a public sector reform context, several observations are presented in the

following. Overall, the impacts of public-sector-reform-driven changes to working conditions appeared compounded in how these were experienced where these created a sense of conflict with professional values and tensions between other working conditions. These effects typically involved simultaneous changes to multiple characteristics of work and employment, whereby a worsening of the negative or positive perceptions could be noted either in the extent to which changes negatively or positively resonated with professional values, or in increases in one job characteristic flowing from decreases in one or multiple others.

### *Professional value conflict and compounded negative experiences of intensity in work*

The conflictual nature of neoliberal public sector reform approaches against professionalism has been extensively discussed in PA or sociology of work literatures (Randle and Brady, 1997; Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd and Walker, 2004c; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2008; O'Reilly and Reed, 2011; Noordegraaf, 2015; Leicht, 2016a; Olakivi and Niska, 2017). As was noted previously, such conflict in itself gave rise to novel psychosocial demands. Findings in this study have illustrated how such conflict between professional values and public sector reform measures implemented across the two case studies produced novel demands; particularly, a sense of role conflict. Negative relations with management were reportedly compounded where managerial approaches were evaluated negatively as a result of perceptions of conflict with professional values. Moreover, negative relations with management appeared to negatively affect valued job resources, such as professional autonomy (resting at the level of the occupation).

Findings from the two case studies suggested that increases in both quantitative and qualitative demands could be worsened in their negative experiences in the extent to which these conflicted with professional values

and identity. There was some suggestion of worsened negative experiences of workload increases (as quantitative job demands) where their nature conflicted with a profession's sense of purpose or professional autonomy over tasks and methods of their work. This was associated with an erosion of how strongly those characteristics of work and employment generally perceived as positive, continued to be experienced as such. In both case studies, tasks could be viewed negatively in either challenging participants' professional autonomy to decide and maintain standards in their work, or in reducing the potential for positive experiences of prosocial job characteristics. In FE this concerned the pressures presented in connection to class sizes, retention and pass rates, in conjunction with changes in the student demographic (a focus on 16 to 19 year olds; student attitudes to study). For FFs this related to increased office-based work, feeling unwanted in services offered, and other increases in tasks which challenged their identity of being appreciated helpers (or likewise induced a more-critical view amongst beneficiaries including the public).

Tasks associated with satisfying reporting and accountability mechanisms, as well as performance targets, could be seen in both case studies to exemplify 'alien intrusions' (Noordegraaf, 2015). Professional judgements and maintenance of standards, oversight from management who were increasingly considered not to share the same professional values, background or experience and therefore deemed unqualified to judge the quality of professional work or be considered sources of authority, compounded negative experiences of work; in accord with arguments presented in prior academic debates (Ackroyd, 2013; McCann and Granter, 2019).

Managerial behaviour in itself presented a psychosocial job demand in both case studies. The psychosocial demands associated with management by numbers and non-participatory, autocratic management styles (characteristics typically associated with managerialism or a "cost- and client-

based managerialism” (Noordegraaf, 2007, p. 763)) propagated, for instance, reports of workplace bullying, aggression, or perpetual conflict. These demands are not only in themselves associated with stress (Muñoz de Bustillo *et al.*, 2009, p. 142; OECD, 2013; Semmer and Beehr, 2013), but arguably may be seen as having been compounded by conflict with professional preferences for peer review and collegial maintenance of standards and quality in work; a finding that resonates for example with suggestions by Evetts (2011, 2013).

### *Professional value conflict and reduced positive experiences of job resources*

As well as being associated with novel demands in the form of role conflict, the forms of task increase discussed above reduced the potential for positive experiences otherwise associated with prosocial job characteristics. The extent to which changes in prosocial job characteristics allowed for realisation of professional values could reduce or strengthen positive experiences thereof. Reform-driven changes to the purpose of the two sectors and as such, work tasks and the nature of contact with beneficiaries, in combination with a cold fiscal climate, posed such limitations. For FE lecturers, a cold funding climate also affecting wider student support structures, changes in the student cohort’s demographics and increased support needs, as well as student places being available in fewer locations, reduced the extent to which a sense of task significance could be gained. For firefighters, limitations appeared more related to the nature of the novel tasks, feeling competent to carry these out effectively, as well as such tasks being inherently associated with a lower probability of a successful outcome (e.g. resuscitate a casualty at an OHCA incident). Novel tasks which entailed a shift in the nature of FF contact with beneficiaries or the wider public (as sources of positive perceptions, gratitude and recognition of the profession’s sense of social importance) were experienced more negatively.

As concerns a reduction in the positive experiences of intrinsic characteristics of work, the findings from both case studies lend some support to arguments (e.g. Noordegraaf, 2007; Evetts, 2009, 2011; McCann and Granter, 2019) that infringements on professional autonomy, or generally control from outwith the profession, were viewed more negatively. This emanated from questions surrounding the legitimacy of such authority, ways in which this was exerted and its conflict with professional values. Expressions of erosion in the quality, methods and processes of work presented a challenge to the varying extent to which autonomy perceived as positive and was held by both occupations. This was pronounced in FE lecturers, subject to more scrutiny and pressure from external to the occupation.

The cross-case comparison revealed how professional values, across both natures of work, were sensitive to the nature of workload increases and influenced whether these were negatively experienced and potentially exacerbated the pressures of expanding workloads. Across both cases, the nature of task expansions conflicting with professional values produced a sense of role conflict, as did their potential connection to decreases in professional autonomy (as residing at the occupational level in terms of professional peer reviews and maintenance of standards in work). These effects simultaneously boosted the negative effects of quantitative job demands whilst introducing an additional psychosocial job demand.

### *Professional value match and reduced negative or strengthened positive experiences of characteristics of work and employment*

Findings from both cases suggest that professional values may reduce negative experiences of intensity in work, as well as strengthen positive experiences of working conditions.



Further, the negative effects of quantitative job demands (such as workload increases) may be dampened where they are more attuned to a profession's sense of purpose and maintenance of preferences in relation to prosocial job characteristics. This reflects propositions by Wright, Irving and Selvan Thevatas (2020) that professionals may pursue several strategies in preserving/reconciling professional values when enacting managerialist practices. Some of the psychosocial demands posed by managerialist notions of 'more intensive utilisation of labour' and 'demonstrating value for money' may be partially mitigated by workers' values. An example may be seen in how FFs rationalised (past and prospective) task expansion into those domains not traditionally associated with the occupation, yet remaining aligned with a FF's values of 'helping people/saving lives'; tasks such as preventive activities and OHCA+ (and beyond).

Where job resources were attuned to or facilitated realisation of professional values, positive effects were noted on individual outcomes. This concerns collegial relations in team work, positive relations with line management, training arrangements (for FFs) and most notably, prosocial job characteristics. These prosocial relational aspects of work proved important to participants across both case studies in terms of their relation to what were seen as meaningful, satisfying, rewarding experiences of work, as was proposed for instance by Kahn (1990) and Grant (2007, 2008). For FE lecturers, this included witnessing positive personal transformations in students, such as in self-confidence and independence in using public transport, which may not be evaluable in terms of academic achievement. For firefighters, one such prosocial aspect was the intrinsic satisfaction of a tangible positive response from the public and beneficiaries in response to emergency rescues.

*The individual job outcomes of the dynamic between job demands, resources and professional values*

There are several implications of the dynamics of working conditions with professional values. These concern negative wellbeing/health outcomes, such as stress, burnout or sickness absence, attitudinal outcomes in terms of morale and satisfaction with characteristics of the job, including intrinsically satisfying and rewarding experiences of work, as well as intentions to leave. The dynamics between types of working conditions and individual outcomes largely mirror relations described in the conceptual underpinnings of the JD-R model, yet with a particular emphasis on psychosocial demands posed by increasing managerialism as a demand of same. Accordingly, in line with core propositions of the JD-R literature (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Lesener, Gusy and Wolter, 2019), job demands, most notably quantitative job demands, were reportedly connected to increasing experiences of stress. This was particularly pronounced in the FE case study which was generally characterised by significantly higher reports of job demands altogether and experiences of stress; several participants described FE lecturing as a 'burnout job', opting to switch to working part-time hours in order to cope with the demands of the job, or leaving the job entirely. These empirical findings raise questions over the longer-term sustainability of employment in FE lecturing in the light of the significant job demands reported. While sickness absence appeared an issue across both cases, the origins of incidences of sickness were not necessarily reported as being work-related; at least as was reported for firefighters, who arguably were facing overall fewer job demands compared to FE lecturers.

Further in line with the JD-R model's proposed relations, namely that job resources foster positive attitudes to work (e.g. Bakker and Demerouti, 2008; Peccei, 2012), resource erosion was connected to negative effects on morale. Upheaval in social resources as a result of reorganisation (such as disruption to work teams by becoming spread across multiple college

campuses), alongside antagonistic relations with management reportedly connected to negative effects on morale. Interestingly, although financial rewards tend to be neglected in work engagement based research (George, 2011; Kulikowski and Sedlak, 2020), FF case study findings pointed towards the importance of pay to morale (i.e. work engagement). Ultimately, however, it could be argued that the scale in the extent to which the cumulative effects of from consecutive waves of public sector reform had altered working conditions across both case studies, it could be argued that some favourable individual outcomes remained. Firefighters still reported more job satisfaction than FE lecturers. Reduced job resources such as pay and pensions were nevertheless connected to some firefighters leaving the sector. Intentions to remain were reported as being connected, in varying part, to FF and FE-lectureship jobs still offering potential for work to be experienced as intrinsically satisfying and rewarding, such as through their prosocial job characteristics.

Overall, findings pointed towards members increasingly leaving both occupations, albeit for different reasons. This would suggest that indeed, some of the once more favourable aspects of public sector employment have become increasingly eroded by the cumulative effects of consecutive waves of public sector reform. FFs exiting the occupation were reported as being primarily driven by financial pressures, compounded by the negative fallout of the 2002/03 pension reforms, and further influenced by changes in the job and negative managerial relations. For FE lecturers, quantitative job demands leading to experiences of stress and a sense of not being able to maintain professional standards and quality in work (and therefore to a reduced perception of task significance), which was to some extent further relevant to experiencing task significance, were apparently central reasons for exiting the sector and occupation, or at the least reducing contractual hours.

#### 8.2.4. The role of occupational context: Identifying similarities and differences in the role of professional values concerning experiences of working conditions

The fourth research question asked about the role played by occupational context. Several considerations were involved in selecting examples of occupational context to facilitate analysis of whether and how this influenced the dynamics between professional values in relation to experiences of working conditions in a reform context.

A core difference between the Job Demands-Resources model and prior work design models is that it does not specify which working conditions will be the most important in any given occupation or job for predicting individual job outcomes (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). In this respect, the model is also distinctive from the generally 'static' Job Quality (JQ) frameworks based on ex ante specifications surrounding which working conditions make for 'good' jobs (Simms, 2017). Rather, as de Jonge, Demerouti and Dormann (2014) have pointed out, the model provides an analytical heuristic for exploring experiences of working conditions, through the lens of job demands and resources, in relation to individual wellbeing. This was taken into account in the sampling strategy - for comparative purposes, to draw out differences between occupations - but also in regard to sampling for macro-level contextual influences as detailed in Chapter 5 and Appendix A.

Consequently, two occupations characterised by a very distinctive nature of work could be expected to differ in which aspects of work and employment are significant and likewise, which are experienced more positively or negatively. The examples of knowledge work (FE) and emergency work (FRS) were chosen, further in consideration of degree of occupational

professionalisation (ONS, 2010), and strength of collective institutions. Both occupations represent the largest staff category within two sectors in which reorganisation measures sought to facilitate cuts to expenditure on public services.

The findings from the two case studies presented in this thesis make a strong case for the importance of accounting for context, specifically as concerns social structural context. Despite the significant differences in the occupations' nature of work, various strong similarities emerged in terms of the *dynamics* between professional values in relation to the significance and experiences of work and employment as job demands or resources under neoliberal public sector reform was revealed. In line with scholarly literatures (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017, pp. 215–216; Bal and Dóci, 2018), this finding arguably is reflective of the homogenising effects of a hegemonic ideology operating at the structural level, i.e. the processes of neoliberalisation, whilst the distinct historical context of each sector brought forth specifics which could be observed as differences at the empirical level.

As Chapters 1 and 3 argued, a concern with the 'psychologisation of employment relations (ER)' (Godard, 2014) resides in the decontextualized, individualistic approaches to understanding experiences of work and employment inherent to psychological theories (Kaufman, 2020). The relevance of social structures (including institutional or economic structures) and mechanisms as influences on work and employment is therefore lacking in work design models used as lenses to analyse how these are experienced (Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017). It was argued that an ER-informed adaptation of the JD-R model thus, at its core, must reflect a conception of the employment relation as embodying a 'structured antagonism' (Edwards, 1990) between competing employer and employee interests. This informed the selection of a public sector framing characterised by strong ideological attachment to the neoliberal paradigm (Bach, 2016) and specifically, a focus on public sector professionalism (i.e. occupations with

strong values and collective institutions) as an example of competing employee interests (e.g. Crompton, 1990; Freidson, 2001). As the discussion surrounding RQ1 (see Section 8.2.1. and Appendix B) concluded, processes of neoliberalisation – in this case analysed through the heuristic lens of the logics of ‘economy’, ‘efficiency’ and ‘effectiveness’ in public sector reform approaches – have structurally retained their core (Hood, 1995), whereby differences in implemented reform measures rather constitute ‘variation on a theme’ (Edwards and Hodder, 2022, p. 228).

This is reflected in similarities in the nature of experiences of change, and in the dynamics between reforms and professional values across both cases. These dynamics embody the content of antagonism between neoliberalism’s structural core and professional ideology. The hegemony of the dominant ideology (Bal and Dóci, 2018) thus could be argued to have homogenising effects (as illustrated in similarities of experiences exemplifying this conflict), whereby variation resides at the empirical level in terms of how these structural dynamics manifest within specific contexts. Findings from both cases illustrate how professional values conflicting with the nature of changes imposed by neoliberal reform influence experiences of work and employment in a more negative manner. Moreover, similarities existed whereby working conditions were attuned to professional values and thus positively experienced or gained significance in relation to ameliorating experiences of job demands overall.

Neoliberal reform oriented along the maxim of ‘doing more with less’ (Hood, 2013, p. 216) hence presents a dual influence; increasing sources of intensity in work, whilst reducing both the rewards available from work and those aspects of work and employment which might otherwise be mitigating negative experiences. The specifics at the empirical level vary, but these tendencies are reflected across both cases. Equally, professional value conflict, or a match between professional values and perceptions of the characteristics of work and employment as being more or less favourable

(thus potentially as demanding or resourceful), were observed to impact experiences of job demands and resources, as well as their dynamic to shape individual outcomes. Perhaps a notable difference resides between FE and FRS, whereby the nature of work and risk-based arguments negotiating the scope of reform, may have offered some more protection to fire services compared to FE. As such, FFs still reported more potential for positive individual job outcomes as compared to FE lecturers.

The strong similarities in *experiences* of job demands between the two occupations might reflect the particular nature of effects from consecutive decades of neoliberal reform, each effectively guided by the logics of the three 'Es', irrespective of implementational nuances. Driven by an ideological commitment to the imperative of maintaining or further curtailing a tightened public expenditure, such reform measures have targeted more intensive utilisation of fewer staff with increased oversight of the usage of such 'inputs' (Noordegraaf, 2007). This is reflected in findings from both case studies, in which experiences of high job demands were widely reported. An exception being physical job demands which were less salient in FE than for FFs, where these indeed represented sources of positive reinforcement of their professional identities as heroes and life savers and associated elevated social status. A caveat to this surrounds concerns over FFs ability to maintain operational fitness and so meet such demands up to retirement age.

Across both cases, the respective trade unions were able to mitigate, from the perspective of the frontline, some less-desirable changes to working conditions. Yet, the nature of work appears to some degree relevant here and whether quality-based arguments surrounding risk- or training-based arguments could bear as much gravitas as those surrounding quality in teaching. For firefighters, this concerned negotiations surrounding the broadened task expansion to, for example, respond to more incidents of a more medical nature, such as out-of-hospital cardiac arrests. For further education lecturers, this concerned the upward pay harmonisation as part of

the reinstatement of national level collective bargaining, which nevertheless came at the expense of an increase in work intensity in the form of larger credit targets.

## 8.2.5. Section conclusions

Findings in this thesis have illuminated how job resources or demands may gain saliency through the lens of professional values in the context of public sector reform and how the interaction between job resources, job demands and public sector reform and austerity measures inter-dynamically alters constellations of job demands and resources. While in JD-R literature demands and resources co-vary (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007, 2017), this study has advanced a more detailed understanding of how such changes affect professionals in public service under public sector reform in a cold fiscal climate. The presented findings raise an alarm in the light of arguments that job resources gain particularly high saliency in the context of high work demands considering that some increases in work demands were connected to decreases in certain job resources. In particular, this is concerning where a 'matching' of job resources to the job demands is deemed necessary for the former to have positive effects (Hobfoll, 1989; Bakker *et al.*, 2007; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009a; de Jonge, Demerouti and Dormann, 2014; Lu *et al.*, 2015; Van den Broeck and Parker, 2017). Consequently, where inverse relations between working conditions may exist, this would pose challenges and limit the extent to which certain job resources can positively influence experiences of work. The homogenising tendencies in experiences posed by structurally dominant ideology, namely neoliberalism (Bal and Dóci, 2018), as well as how these resonate with meso-level ideology (professional values).



## 8.3. Thesis contributions

### 8.3.1. Theoretical Contribution: Applying an interdisciplinary, pluralist adaptation of a psychosocial model to employment relations

The thesis proposed a framework, which adapted the Job Demands-Resource model, as a lens for understanding how changes to characteristics of work and employment driven by neoliberal public sector reform are experienced by public service professionals. This framework was used to explore the intersection of institutional context (public sector reform and professional values) with experiences of characteristics of work and employment and their potential to shape individual professionals' health and wellbeing outcomes. The research makes a core contribution to debates in employment relations concerned with the 'psychologisation' of the field (Godard, 2014). Specifically, the research has explored potential for an interdisciplinary adaptation of work design models from ER's traditionally pluralist perspective in order to build on the strengths and popularity of such models, while addressing their limitations.

The research makes two contributions to employment relations literatures, the first concerns debates surrounding the psychologisation of the field in proposing a potential avenue forward on how such a perceived trend may be remedied. Beyond merely speaking to the psychologisation debates, broader conceptual implications can be drawn from the pluralist, interdisciplinary adaptation of the Job-Demands Resources model advanced in this thesis for offering a contextualised, interdynamic perspective on how job quality (JQ) is experienced, thus moving beyond 'static' JQ frameworks (Simms, 2017), as well as illuminating some of the nexus between how macro- and meso-level context shapes experiences of working conditions (e.g. Budd and Spencer,

2015; Hebson, Rubery and Grimshaw, 2015). These are presented in more detail in the following; the first relating to contextualising work design to take into account macro-level influences, such as public sector reform, and meso-level influences, namely professional values, as relevant social structural context. The second contribution suggests a starting point for adapting work design models to step beyond unitarist assumptions so to more accurately reflect the pluralism of interests characterising employment relations. This is particularly pertinent to public service contexts which are characterised by tensions in the competing interests of the neoliberal state as employer/reformer and the professions working within them, having traditionally laid claim to altruism (e.g. Saks, 1995), as well as their representation by trade unions.

### *Contextualising influences on work design: The role of social structures*

The first conceptual contribution this study has made concerns having advanced a better understanding of how working conditions come to gain significance and be experienced as job demands and job resources. Professional values were proposed in this thesis as an occupation-level influence with the potential to shape expectations of, and attitudes to, working conditions and changes therein. In doing so, the study has answered calls to contextualise work design focused research (Tausig and Fenwick, 2011; Johns, 2017; Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017; Dierdorff, 2019) and has contributed to literatures highlighting how the JD-R model can be adapted for application across professional contexts, such as the public service context (Bauwens, Decramer and Audenaert, 2021). This nascent strand within public administration (PA) literatures has suggested that job resources may be more homogenous beyond the job-level in public service and be located at analytically higher levels, such as group-levels. As suggested by Dierdorff (2019), this research has further built on this to

suggest the level of the occupation as an analytically relevant tier for assessing the meaning ascribed to working conditions, when these come to be significant and are experienced positively or negatively.

Context has implications both for characteristics of work and employment as well as their relations (Johns, 2017; Bauwens, Decramer and Audenaert, 2021). In particular in public service, some decisions affecting working conditions (or work design) can directly be taken by (central) government and as such beyond the organisational (i.e. management) level, as was the original premise of the JD-R model, and beyond individual 'proactive' behaviours, such as job crafting, by which variation in job characteristics has been explained more recently (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

In this study such governmental influences emanated from the UK-level in terms of the austerity measures implemented by the Westminster Government. The reduced public budget which these produced subsequently translated into a central aim of and necessity for public sector reform measures nationally in Scotland. Additional higher-level influences on working conditions particularly pertinent to work and employment in public services concern, for instance, degrees of professionalisation and the respective extent of occupational control over work organisation and employment as well as trade unions bargaining at sectoral/national levels for improvements therein (Larson, 1977; Muzio, Brock and Suddaby, 2013; Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017; Dierdorff, 2019). As a result, this study has supported the observation that working conditions captured in the JD-R model may be situated at higher levels of analysis than the individual job-level and be more homogenous between, for instance, public servants or members of a profession/occupation (Dierdorff, 2019; Bauwens, Decramer and Audenaert, 2021). This may concern, for instance, shared perceptions of job demands through socialisation into a professional role and its requirements (Dierdorff and Morgeson, 2007) or job resources, such as pay (Bauwens, Decramer and Audenaert, 2021).

In this research, professional values and identity and the extent to which these conflicted with reform and austerity driven changes in working conditions exposed additional sources of job demands and shaped, in some instances and to varying degree, which job demands were experienced more negatively and which were viewed more favourably. In terms of job demands, findings from this research have suggested an interdynamic between qualitative and quantitative demands whereby the nature of increases in quantitative job demands (workload) mattered as much or more than increases in workloads themselves. Increases in workload perceived to align more closely with participants' professional values and identity (sense of purpose) could as a result be viewed more positively, whereas workload increases conflicting with professional values and identity, such as those perceived as being associated with managerialist agendas and/or challenging professional judgements, practices and standards, could be compounded in their negative effects as a result of such conflict.

Consequently, above and beyond quantitative job demands (work intensity), such as workloads and work pressure, psychosocial demands played a highly significant role as sources of stress and negative experiences of work. This contributes to debates which have examined how 'extreme contingencies', such as restructuring and downsizing, translate into negative experiences of work in increasing quantitative job demands utilising a JD-R framework (Harney, Fu and Freeney, 2018). Here it is suggested that indeed qualitative job demands associated with such events further help explain and are worth considering in studies examining employee-centric experiences of reorganisation and downsizing, not least taking into account findings (Eurofound, 2015, 2017) highlighting a trend toward a higher prevalence of reports of bullying in restructured workplaces in cross national comparison. The research suggested inverse relations between certain job demands and resources highlighting the antagonism between managerialism and professionalism. Tightened managerial control as a psychosocial demand

was connected to lower autonomy, whereas increased experiences of role conflict were connected to decreased prosocial job characteristics.

In addition, further such social influences were noted in connection to how professional values and identity resonated with job resources to shape which aspects or levels of job resources were perceived as favourable, such as pay reflecting the social value of services rendered by a profession (Scheuer, 2013) or prosocial characteristics of work matching professional preferences of how beneficiary relations should be structured or how and what help should be rendered.

### *Reconceptualising work design models: Towards pluralism*

The second conceptual contribution to work design literatures relates to how the JD-R model can further be adapted to more accurately account for the nature of employment relations as characterised by pluralism. Public sector employment relations in which trade unions and collective bargaining have traditionally been more prominent and influential (e.g. Symon, 2011; Martínez Lucio, 2020) have highlighted the need for a more pluralistic conceptualisation of public sector working conditions and their relations than usually captured in the traditional JD-R framework. To reflect on diverging interests for a pluralist framing, neoliberal public sector reform measures provided an illustrative example of a complex institutional context and strong ideological commitments. This complexity indicates the need for understanding how changes in working conditions are experienced, accepted, contested and negotiated by social agents, drawing on notions such as power, ideology or conflict (Bailey *et al.*, 2017; Bal and Dóci, 2018).

This research adapted the JD-R model in order to reflect diverging interests in employment and work relations and the power dynamics these contain (Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013; Godard, 2014; Bailey *et al.*, 2017). Public

sector employment under neoliberal reform and austerity is arguably characterised by an increasing drift between the values held by individuals, including those connected to professionally shared values, and those espoused by the organisation (as influenced or redefined by the neoliberal state) which necessitated such an adaptation. In building on employees' perspectives of how these understand their jobs and interpret changes therein, the thesis provided a finer grained understanding of what individuals see as the requirements of their jobs and how compliance with these is understood. The research further suggested aspects relating to collective interest representation as an important job resource to consider in public sector based applications of the JD-R. It has been argued that perspectives and models which assume unitarism, such as the JD-R, have de-contextualised the study of such models' components, relations and mechanisms underpinning the latter from relevant phenomena and contextual influences (Cullinane and Dundon, 2006; Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013; Godard, 2014; Keenoy, 2014; Purcell, 2014; Bailey *et al.*, 2017). In doing so, this has placed artificial limitations on the explanatory power provided by such work design models concerning.

This further connects to the study's proposition that the largely unquestioned, generally assumed 'goal consensus' within the model is inadequately reflective of organisational realities in public service jobs under neoliberal reform. Neoliberal reforms alter the requirements of public sector jobs, purposes of public sector organisations (e.g. from fire brigades to fire and rescue services to include more medical emergencies; from FE colleges as a place of 'lifelong learning' shifting to catering to 16 to 19 year olds first and foremost), relations with service users (beneficiaries) and thus job 'goals' which, as this study has argued, have been seen to be diverging from professional interests, i.e. the 'goals' of individual job holders, if yet to varying extent. In this study, tending to professional values in relation to such changes, psychosocial demands, and collective interest representation arrangements allowed reflecting on such diverging interests and conflict.

Contextualising and examining job roles from the perspective of individuals' understandings of the purposes of their occupations has allowed accounting for [social] mechanisms more widely recognised in critical perspectives underpinning compliance with 'work goals' (e.g. Gall and Hebdon, 2008; Thompson and Harley, 2008; Smith, 2015, 2016; Worrall, Mather and Cooper, 2016), such as punitive, performance-based funding mechanisms. This has extended beyond the model's motivational effects of job resources or challenge demands in terms of what 'fostered' an individual's "willingness to dedicate one's efforts and abilities to [what] work task" (Demerouti and Bakker, 2011, p. 2). This has followed calls by Grant, Fried and Juillerat (2011, p. 444) for using qualitative methodology "to identify new job characteristics and fresh mechanisms through which these job characteristics may influence employees' attitudes and behaviors".

Findings from both case studies presented in this research have emphasised the role of informal, hidden, indirect as well as more overt mechanisms of coercion underpinning any 'willingness' or 'unwillingness' to carry out work tasks. These ranged from the implicit (or explicit) threat of job loss or job status insecurity (e.g. increased teaching hours in FE, or additional tasks conflicting with an FF's ethos) as a result of a cold funding environment, including punitive funding mechanisms; to management attempting to or effectively side stepping union agreements defining work roles, leveraging contractual precarity (e.g. in FE the promise of permanent lecturing positions), and exerting informal pressure in creating conflictual social relations at work, bullying, and intense scrutiny of work.

Ultimately then, instead of or in addition to individualistic approaches to improving working conditions, e.g. work redesign through individual 'job crafting', mainstream organizational behaviour perspectives overall could benefit from considering integrating more pluralistic views of employment relations in which job/work design models are embedded as far as the concern is to more comprehensively understand individual and wellbeing

outcomes. Wider organisational contexts and environments can constrain room and appetite for improved working conditions in situating powerful interest groups which may stand too little to gain in following recommendations for job-level interventions promoted in JD-R/work design literatures, such as facilitating 'job crafting' (e.g. Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013; Thompson, 2013; Godard, 2014; Purcell, 2014) despite studies arguing that these indeed may reap organisational benefits (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009b). In recognising the role played by powerful interest groups within the wider context to shape work design, this would address a lack of "understanding of the nature of the employment relation as one of subordination under conditions of interest conflict" (Godard, 2014, p. 7) in JD-R literatures and foster more fully employee centric perspectives of stress and wellbeing able to explain broader dynamics of (the origins of characteristics of) work and employment in relation to their outcomes. Conceptually, both professionalisation efforts to gain greater occupational control over working conditions (work organisation and characteristics of employment) as well as collective interest representation through trade unions (or professional associations) therefore may provide alternative and more effective mechanisms for employee-led changes to work design associated with positive outcomes than the ability of individualistic 'job crafting' to deliver positive outcomes (or the effectively self-motivated employee) under what may to varying degrees be essentially diverging interests. As Martínez Lucio (2020) has highlighted, research on stress in work rarely considers the role of trade unions.

### 8.3.2. Empirical contribution

Empirically, the research has answered calls for more multi-occupation, comparative studies (Muzio, Brock and Suddaby, 2013). Selected for a distinctive nature of work, the two occupations under study were situated in



the Scottish public sector representing similarities in contextual backdrop to the study of public sector reform and institutional change. Although characterised by somewhat more institutional complexity owing to variation in devolved over reserved legislative powers between Scotland and Westminster, central UK policy direction provided the overarching aim of reform (fiscal retrenchment). Considering that the Scottish public budget is derived through the Barnett formula, but yet the mixture of devolved and reserved legislative areas, this in some ways influenced the content and shape of public sector reform measures within the Scottish context. Historical developments in this environment further had shaped the public sector reform contexts' characteristics at the time of study (e.g. collective bargaining for FFs' terms and conditions taking place at the UK-national level whereas the same for FE lecturers could only be reintroduced at the Scottish-level). Considering the overarching structural influences on reform measures emanating as part of centrally determined neoliberalisation processes and their objectives which have homogenising implications for the *nature* of changes to characteristics of work and employment in public services, similarities in patterns of experiences of working conditions, in spite of the highly distinctive nature of work characterising the case studies, are perhaps not surprising. Both case studies have illustrated the challenges of finding means to further rationalise a state and its public service provision that has already been subject to extensive 'hollowing out' (Thompson, 2007) over previous decades. It therefore remains the question to what extent differences between the UK nations are discursive than substantive in nature which was, however, beyond the scope of this thesis.

In being situated in the Scottish context, the research has highlighted a paradox in the public sector reforms that have characterised the two case studies arguably reflecting the degree of ideological differences to reform approaches pursued by Westminster as well as its budgetary pressures. In the Scottish case studies, public sector reforms have sought to strengthen essentially unitarist ideology through enhanced emphasis on performance

outcomes and to redefine the public interest as defined by the values of the market, such as efficiency, value for money/cost effectiveness, and consumer choice/power. Simultaneously, however, public sector reforms in Scotland have sought to strengthen pluralistic approaches to public sector employment relations. Providing governmental funds for 'voluntary' severances, public sector employers were, for instance, instructed to operate a no compulsory redundancy policy in effecting organisational downsizing as part of the reform measures and, in the case of FE colleges, in moving the sector back to collective bargaining at the Scottish national level. Yet, there remains a question to what extent this move was initially more symbolic than substantive considering that simultaneously the budget for the sector as a whole was reduced and funding mechanisms overhauled placing further obstacles in the bargaining process before granting additional (if yet, as employers argued, insufficient) funds for national harmonisation of terms and conditions. Overall, however, the SNP Scottish Government's attitude to trade unionism was widely perceived as more favourable and generally less hostile towards those working in the public services compared to Westminster.

The cross-case comparison has further revealed similarities in the relevance of and influences on experiences of working conditions by professional values across two occupations characterised by a highly distinctive nature of work. Across both case studies, findings highlighted how professional values underpinned interpretations and evaluations of working conditions. First, this further led to the identification of sources of job demands bearing particular significance for understanding experiences of professional jobs in a public service reform context. Second, concerning prosocial job characteristics this has pointed towards instances in which professional notions of the 'public interest' may be more (or less) attuned to what arguably is of greater benefit to individual beneficiaries or the wider public. Certainly, in the case of FE there is the stark question to which extent reducing opportunities for learners in the form of reductions in part-time places offered, provision of courses

across multiple campuses, and disadvantageous learning conditions (such as student numbers exceeding equipment available on ICT courses), to name a few, could even be deemed as in line with the Scottish Government's own definition of the public's interest as a fairer, more equal society (see, for instance, SNP, 2015). Moreover, tending to prosocial values has suggested that professional espousal of such values can be more than a mask for occupational self-interest, but that indeed self-interest could be connected to satisfaction of prosocial values where this fostered and supported an occupation's sense of feeling socially valued. In the case of firefighters, a duality was revealed in how satisfaction of prosocial motives was connected to both intrinsic satisfaction from work as well as in catering to self-interest in terms of recognition, pride and feeling socially valued. Yet, as, for example Le Grand (2003b) reminds us, this also reveals that self-interest can be other interested. Across both case studies, professional understandings of how prosocial values could be realised in work were related to preferences about prosocial job characteristics which were subject to changes and pressures as a result of (consecutive) public sector reform and a cold fiscal climate.

### 8.3.3. Practical implications

The findings suggest practical implications for public sector reform initiatives. Prior research has documented the managerialist, marketizing practices of various neoliberal public sector reform measures and the role played by professional strategies of resistance and accommodation based on occupational values to shape reform outcomes, such as changes in professional practice (Ackroyd, Kirkpatrick and Walker, 2007). While this research has again highlighted the conflictual nature between neoliberal reform objectives with public service professionalism, it further proposes that rather than there necessarily being conflict between reform objectives with preferences of public services professionals, in the same vein as suggested

by several writers (Ackroyd, Kirkpatrick and Walker, 2007; Parding, Abrahamsson and Berg-Jansson, 2012; Wright, Irving and Selvan Thevatas, 2020; Chen, Currie and McGivern, 2021), there is some degree of potential for reform sensitive to or leveraging particular occupational values to lead to fewer experiences of antagonism. In this research, this was evident in the case of job enlargement proposed in the firefighter case study. Yet, it also needs to be noted that in the previously cited studies (bar Parding, Abrahamsson and Berg-Jansson, 2012) professionals had opportunities to shape or influence work reorganisation and associated new practice rather than this being dictated in a top down manner which characterised not only both case studies presented in this study, but also has been noted as a characteristic of public sector reform implementation in the UK in PA literatures (e.g. Diefenbach, 2009; Worrall, Mather and Seifert, 2010; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017, p. 339). In the light of an erosion of conditions of work and employment in public service under austerity and neoliberal reform detailed in this study and wider international surveys (e.g. Lodge and Hood, 2012; Vaughan-Whitehead, 2013; Hermann, 2014; Eurofound, 2015, 2017; Bach, 2019), such as an increasing effort-reward imbalance as a result of simultaneous increases in job demands (quantitative and qualitatively) and the parallel erosion of real pay, job security and pensions, and relatively widespread unilateralism or lack of thorough planning in how changes were implemented (Bach and Bordogna, 2013; European Commission, 2013), calls “that professionals try to reserve their judgment [... to create] a liminal space that allows them to be more open-minded [... toward] imposed job redesign or organizational restructuring” (Chen and Reay, 2021, p. 1568) instead of professional resistance to change ring somewhat hollow where such change is largely associated with negative implications for frontline professionals in public service. As Grey (2003, p. 13) reminds us, “The point is an obvious one: by and large people resist change because the change is damaging to them”, such as in terms of workloads, pay or job security as well as where change is perceived as ill-thought out, haphazard and lacking consultation by those with insights on what works.

There is the question to what extent neoliberal public sector reform, and austerity in particular as this in essence constituted a shifting of the burden of GFC onto the wider public first and foremost serving elite interests (Morgan *et al.*, 2011; Blyth, 2013; Dunn, 2014), could truly be deemed to have served any notion of a wider 'public interest'. It is therefore conceivable that those in public service who have traditionally been deemed as committed to serving the 'public interest' or to a service ethic characterised by some notion of altruism and for whom public sector employment provided a route into 'better' or 'good' (in some way or other) jobs find such reforms not only to be conflicting in terms of moral conflict between public service professionalism and neoliberal managerialism, but also as threatening characteristics of these previously somewhat 'better' jobs. Some writers have argued that professional practice may not necessarily be conflictual with managerial changes to work organisation and for managerial practice to come at the expense of professional values (Noordegraaf, 2015; Wright, Irving and Selvan Thevatas, 2020). However, in doing so, these perspectives appear to accept as legitimate or leave unquestioned the drivers of such reorganisation (i.e. expansionary austerity and how associated public sector reform measures were implemented). Subsequently, some of the reasons why professionals may still try to resist public sector reorganisation (such as a potential decline in job quality and sources of meaning in work) remain neglected. Therefore, conflict remains pertinent in a context in which marketizing, managerialist reform approaches remain dominant.

## 8.4. Limitations

A limitation to the research concerns the timing of this in regard to its effects on the sometimes more hypothetical nature of attitudes expressed towards changes in working conditions. At the time of fieldwork, FF attitudes were influenced by the ad hoc, accidental nature in which additional tasks within

newly-expanded roles were encountered (e.g. OHCA+/STFs). Therefore, procedures which have been negotiated with the union, such as protocols for control rooms, may to some extent improve issues with their implementation seen to have triggering negative experiences reported in this case study. An increase in fatality/casualty contact through response to OHCA+ once this has been carried out for a certain length of time may provide an interesting follow-up setting in regard to how this has impacted emotional demands in the broadened FF role. Moreover, in 2020 the SFRS underwent a significant staff engagement exercise set up to inform and shape transformation plans which had stalled since the time of fieldwork in 2017 (SFRS, 2021). As part of this exercise, areas for a potential role expansion of FFs which these viewed more favourably were identified as well as concerns surrounding implementation and how these could be addressed.

Similarly, the timing of the fieldwork in the FE case study overlapping the significant industrial dispute which provided the backdrop to the data collection as well as access issues to participants and subsequent strategies to alleviate these issues. This dispute may in particular have influenced findings regarding attitudes towards trade unionism and upper management. Future research could provide a comparative perspective perhaps set against a more 'business-as-usual' backdrop. Further potential avenues for future work are identified in the following, final section.

## 8.5. Future research

First, future research could place more emphasis on establishing a deeper appreciation for occupation specific professional values and/or how professional values are specifically understood and interpreted by professionals within the context of their work in public service; for instance, following Wright *et al.* (2020). At the same time, the cross-case comparison

presented in this thesis has further revealed similarities in the relevance of, and influences on, experiences of working conditions by professional values across two occupations characterised by a highly distinctive nature of work. Whilst this does not deny the importance and influence of more specific occupational values, as for instance research by Wright *et al.* (2020) has revealed, the conceptual relations revealed by these findings present an initial step towards development of a framework which could be applied to further occupational settings as an avenue for future research seeking to address a scarcity in cross-occupational comparisons (Muzio, Brock and Suddaby, 2013).

Second, future JD-R based research could return to quantitative methodology to model aspects of professional (or collective interest representation) institutions as antecedents of working conditions captured in the JD-R to trace their effects on producing either various positive or potentially negative individual outcomes. This could conceptually extend the model by a group-/occupation-level mechanism for employee-led changes to work design (e.g. Parker, Van den Broeck and Holman, 2017) beyond individual job crafting. However, future research may find further, improved ways to move beyond unitarism in how the JD-R is operationalised so as to better understand individual experiences of working conditions in public sector professions.

Third, the model might benefit also from incorporating or tending to mechanisms of coercion, power relations and diverging interests to further explore how working conditions (i.e. job demands and resources) operate in a wider context of institutional change and how this influences experiences of job demands and resources, e.g. in considering arguments presented by several writers in regard to the influence of the wider environment and various influences of the powerful interest groups situated within it (Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013; Thompson, 2013; Bailey *et al.*, 2017). This might further help to address and explain current ambiguities surrounding when and why

job characteristics, such as job resources, come to be salient and have their postulated (positive or negative) effects (e.g. Schaufeli and Taris, 2014; van Veldhoven *et al.*, 2020). Such studies could draw from critical perspectives, such as industrial relations, political economy or the sociology of work to extend the theorisation of the context in which the relations captured in the JD-R exist



## Appendix A: *Rationale for Selection of Case Study Sectors and Occupations*

	<u>Further Education</u>	<u>Fire and Rescue Service</u>
<b><i>Nature of Work and SOC</i></b>		
	Knowledge Work 'Professional Occupation' (ONS, 2010, 2020)	Emergency Work 'Associate Professional Occupation' (ONS, 2010, 2020)
<b><i>Industrial Relations</i></b>		
	Collective bargaining at the Scottish national-level (reintroduced under the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013 as part of FE college regionalisation reform)  Representation at NJNC through single profession association (EIS FELA)	Collective bargaining at the UK national-level  Representation at NJC through single profession union (FBU)  Terms and conditions for FFs detailed in 'Grey Book' (at time of fieldwork last updated in 2009)
<b><i>Core 'efficiency' reform measure to cut operating expenditure</i></b>		
Organisational Restructuring	Regionalisation of FE provision in Scotland into 13 college regions: total of 43 reduced to 23 (includes non- & incorporated) FE colleges  37 incorporated FE colleges merged into 20 under the Post-16 Education 2013 (Scotland) Act	'Amalgamation' of eight Fire and Rescue Services into single organisation covering whole of Scotland which became operational in 2013 under Police and Fire Reform Act (Scotland) 2012

## Appendix B: *Cross-Sector Comparison of Public Sector Reform Measures*

This appendix synthesises an overview from documentary sources openly available online, supplemented by Key Informant (KI) interviews, which were specifically conducted to better understand the shape of the macro-level reform context cited under Sections 5.3. To maintain anonymity, documentary sources from specific colleges, though publicly available and consulted in developing a robust overview of the sector, are not identified by a reference. The information presented spans from implementation of Westminster austerity in 2010 to the main time of fieldwork (2017).

	<u>Further Education (incorporated colleges)</u>	<u>Fire and Rescue Service</u>
<b><u>'Economy'</u></b>		
Intended expenditure reductions	Mergers and associated cuts to the workforce size were:  Initially expected to bring £50m/y savings from 2015/16 onward (~ 9.8% of the 2011/12 SFC-grant budget) (Audit Scotland, 2015a, p. 10)	'Amalgamation' via reductions to the workforce size, expected to deliver:  2016/17: £294.4m cumulative savings (SFRS, 2017a)  31% reduction for 2012/13 to 2019/20 in comparison to the cumulative budget of the 8 legacy services was expected (Audit Scotland, 2015b)
<b><u>Rationalisation of workforce compensation-related expenditure</u></b>		
Pay: Measures targeting workforce compensation directly	Scottish-level determination of FE lecturer pay  Not directly targeted by Scottish Government reforms	Pay determined at UK level  Effective pay freezes / below inflation pay rises since 2010 (FBU, 2017a)  2015: Retirement age of 60 years maintained

<p>Layoffs: Measures targeting workforce compensation</p>	<p>Scottish Government instructed no compulsory redundancy policy</p> <p>Method for workforce size changes supplementing mergers:</p> <p>Voluntary Severances for FE college staff, including FE lecturers</p>	<p>Scottish Government instructed no compulsory redundancy policy</p> <p>Method for workforce size changes supplementing 'amalgamation':</p> <p>Recruitment freeze, leaver non-replacement, incentivised relocation</p> <p>Voluntary severance (support staff)</p> <p>Switch to leaner shift roster (see below)</p>
<p>Workforce size changes: Totals, FE lecturers and wholetime (WT) firefighters (FFs)</p> <p>(FTE stands for Full-time equivalent)</p>	<p><u>FE Lecturers</u> 2011/12: 5,709 Oct 2017: 5,343 Change: -6.4%</p> <p><u>Non-teaching staff</u> 2011/12: 5,782* Oct 2017: 5,548 Change: -4.0%</p> <p><u>All staff</u> 2011/12: 11,290 Oct 2017: 10,891 Change: -3.5%</p> <p>Reduction of 1,750 (13.8% of the 2010/11 workforce) (Audit Scotland, 2012, 2015a, 2018a; Colleges Scotland, 2018) (*incl. teach. support services)</p>	<p><u>Wholetime FFs</u> 2010: 4,353 2013: 4,151 2017: 3,645</p> <p>Total reduction of 708 WT FFs (16.3% on 2010)</p> <p><u>Control Room staff</u> 2010: 234 2017: 165 Change: -29.5%</p> <p><u>Support staff</u> 2010: 1,129 2017: 838 Change: -25.8%</p> <p><u>All staff</u> (excl. volunteers &amp; retained) 2010: 5,716 2017: 4,648</p> <p>Total reduction of 1068 (18.7% on 2010) (SFRS, 2016a, 2017a)</p>

<p>Workforce composition: further changes</p>	<p><u>Mergers to reduce ‘duplication’ across management:</u></p> <p>Fewer principals, senior lecturers, curriculum managers</p> <p><u>Contractual composition:</u></p> <p>1,089 zero-hours workers as of August 2013 (EIS FELA, 2014)</p> <p>~30-40% of EIS FELA members (i.e. ~25-33% of all lecturers ) on part-time contracts as of 2017</p>	<p><u>Management positions/hierarchy:</u></p> <p>Cuts to mid-management: station/area managers: responsible for more fire stations than previously</p> <p>Backoffice staff reduced</p>
<p>Working time arrangements and shift patterns</p>	<p>Under negotiation/agreed at time of fieldwork:</p> <p>Annual leave entitlement: 62 days or no detriment (unpromoted lecturers)</p> <p>Class contact time agreed as part of pay harmonisation:</p> <p>“23 + 1” hours contact time out of 35 hour working week (NJNC, 2017)</p>	<p>5GDS</p> <p>“5 Group Duty System”</p> <p>Introduced in 2010/11 (WSDA) (Strathclyde Fire and Rescue, 2012) and 2017 (ESDA &amp; NSDA)</p> <p>Target Operating Model (TOM) stipulates crewing levels at fire stations as well as Resource Based Crewing stipulating crewing levels for appliances – determined based on risk and negotiated with FBU</p> <p>New 48h-notice ‘orange’ shifts to call FFs in to cover absences</p> <p>WT FF shortages managed by overtime, taking appliances offline and managing attendance arrangements (SFRS, 2018b)</p>

<p>Changes affecting job roles / task expansion</p>	<p>Increased credit targets set by SFC (pertaining to number of units of teaching) to meet funding pressures emanating from pay harmonisation (Audit Scotland, 2018a)</p> <p>Shift in purpose of FE colleges as providing 'lifelong learning' to 'once only' model of education; i.e. youngest learners emphasised (16 to 19 yr olds, followed by 20 to 24 yr olds)</p> <p>Total student (fulltime/part-time) numbers down 41%, (mostly women and over-25s) (Audit Scotland, 2016)</p>	<p><u>Implemented widened incident response to:</u></p> <p>Assist other agencies; 'Effect Entry', severe weather events</p> <p><u>Trialled/planned incident response to:</u></p> <p>OHCA, 'slips, trips and falls', Marauding terrorist firearms attack (Williams et al., 2017) (SFRS, 2017b)</p> <p>"Organisational transformation" programme (SFRS, 2016c)</p>
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**'Effectiveness'**

Oversight

<p>Governance</p>	<p>College Boards (Regional)</p> <p>Reclassification from charitable status to public organisations; must now seek Ministerial approval for borrowing and may no longer hold reserves (Macpherson, 2016)</p>	<p>Placed under direct control of the Justice Wing of the Scottish Government &amp; removal from local authority control.</p> <p>Board councillors replaced by 'non-executive' board members appointed by ministers (Audit Scotland, 2015b, pp. 12–13)</p>
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Management	<p>Cuts to management positions overall through college mergers reducing duplication across campuses, incl. principals and curriculum leaders</p> <p>Recruitment into management positions opened up to candidates with non-education background (e.g. Curriculum Managers)</p>	<p><u>Redefined management roles:</u></p> <p>DACOS – “Deputy Assistant Chief Officer” – new role replacing Chief Fire Officers of legacy brigades</p> <p>Area Managers - previously “Brigade Manager” (SFRS, 2016a)</p> <p>LSOs – Local Senior Officers – new role with remit to oversee and agree on priorities for local plans (Scottish Government, 2011b; SFRS, 2018b)</p> <p>‘Civilianisation’ of support/back-office staff</p> <p>Disruption from turnover of managers (SFRS, 2016b; Audit Scotland, 2018b)</p>
Performance measurement	‘National outcome framework’ introduced, including KPIs	National ‘outcome’ framework based on “high-level targets” and KPIs
Funding clauses/ structure/ allocation mechanisms	<p>Funding mechanism change in 2015/16 to ‘cost neutral’ credit based mechanism (SFC, 2017)</p> <p>Regional outcome agreements in 2012/13: ‘needs-based’ and ‘negotiated’ with employers (Audit Scotland, 2016)</p> <p>continued on next page...</p>	Central funding allocation following change from local authority to central government control (Justice Wing)

	<p>Option to 'claw back' funding for 'under-performance' against PIs (e.g. student retention, progression within FE college/to university) (SFC, 2013)</p> <p>Annual curriculum reviews against achievement of PIs</p>	
<p>Terms and conditions – context information of note to findings</p>	<p>Reintroduction of national (Scottish) level collective bargaining to FE in 2013:</p> <p>'No detriment clause'</p> <p>Agreement on harmonised levels of pay for unpromoted lecturing staff in 2017:</p> <p>Highest pay spine point of £39,086 to be raised to £40,026 as of 1st April 2016 incrementally over three years (Colleges Scotland, 2016b)</p> <p>Biggest pay difference between the highest and lowest pay rate for unpromoted FE lecturers was ~ £10-12,000 (NJNC, 2018)</p> <p>(further terms and conditions under negotiation/agreed as above)</p>	<p>WT pay was to be raised from £21,500 to £30,000 (not yet achieved at time of fieldwork) (FBU, 2016, 2017b)</p> <p>Pay freezes or &lt;1% increases (below inflation) since 2010 (FBU, 2017a)</p> <p>Retirement benefits reduced and retirement age increased to 60 years (2013)</p> <p>'National fitness level' agreed in 2015 based on 'VO2max' (NJC, 2016)</p> <p>Scottish-level harmonization of WT FF pay, e.g. for specialist services not achieved in 2017</p> <p>Non-pensionable £1,000 pay uplift for 'specialist duties', such as response to marauding fire arms attacks, rejected in 2017</p>

# Appendix C Interview Guide – FE Lecturers

## Introduction

1. What is your job title/role?
  - a. [If applicable] Is your profession the role that you are working in now?
2. Could you please give me a brief summary of your education/career?
  - a. How long have you been in your current role for?
  - b. Have you undergone any professional training/education?
  - c. For how long have you been with your current organisation?
  - d. For how long have you been working in the public services?
  - e. Have you had previous roles within the private sector?
3. Which were you primarily attracted to:
  - a. Work in your profession
  - b. Work in the public services
  - c. Neither one in particular
  - d. Both
4. Think back to when you started as a lecturer in college, what attracted you to do this? Please read fully through the below list and then select as many items as you like.

→ hand out prompt sheet – appeal for entering lecturing profession [Job Resources Prompt]

5. Do these initial reasons for seeking your current employment still persist or are there any other aspects of your employment that are now more important to you?
  - a. If so, what are these?
6. How do these reasons relate to your experience of work since 2013?



- a. Do you feel that your experience of work since 2013 matches up with what you were originally looking for in your work place when joining your current job?
  - b. If not, in what ways is it not matching up?
  - c. In your mind, how come? What caused changes?
  - d. Is there anything that you consider to be constraining to the fulfilment of these motives for seeking your employment?
7. What aspects of your current employment do you dislike? [probe for public services vs profession]
  8. What aspects of your current employment do you like? [probe for public services vs profession]
  9. Are there any aspects of your work that you find demanding? [that require effort?]

## Job Demands

10. In addition to what we just discussed, please take a few minutes to read through the following items and tick any other aspects of your employment you find to be demanding.

→ Hand out demands sheet [Job Demands Prompt Sheet]

11. Which of these demanding aspects of your work do you feel have had the biggest impact on you and your working life?
12. How have these affected you?
13. Would this list have been the same five or so years ago? If not, how would it be different? Have any demands shifted, intensified or lessened?
14. Can you think of an incident in the last year or so when you, as a result, experienced any feelings of being emotionally or physically depleted?

15. Can you think of an incident when as a result of these you have felt stressed?
16. [If yes to 19. & 20.] How much so have you felt like that? Did you need to take time off sick as a result? Or have you come in even though you were ill? Have you considered changing your workplace because of it? Do you have to take work home? Do you think about work a lot outside of work? How often would this occur?
17. Have there been changes to your job role in the last five years?
18. Have the tasks you carry out as part of this changed in any way?
- If so, how?
  - Do you carry out tasks that are not part of your role?
  - If so, how often would this occur (perhaps daily, multiple times per week, weekly...)?
  - What is your opinion on this?
19. Is your role clearly outlined and defined? Do you think your job title fits well with the actual work you do?

## Trade Union Membership

20. Are you a member of a trade union? [If yes, proceed. If no, ask why not and if interviewee had considered it as some point]
21. Would you say that you have benefitted from being a trade union member in the light of recent reforms of the sector? If so, how?
- Pay?
  - Curriculum hours or other t&c's?
  - In terms of grievance formulation?
  - Performance management issues?
  - Anything you would like to add?

22. Do you feel that your interests are sufficiently being looked after by your union?
23. To what extent has your union managed to buffer or renegotiate changes to your terms and conditions in the light of post-2008 reforms?

## Experiences of demands and resources

24. How enthusiastic do you feel about your:
- a. Job?
  - b. Work with your organisation?
  - c. Work in the public services?  
....changed at all (more, less, same?)?
25. Can you think of incidents in the last year or so that had a positive effect on your enthusiasm? Please tell me more about this incident.
26. [If applicable] What helped you in dealing with the (1) negative feelings and (2) changes in your workplace we previously talked about?
- a. Social contact and exchange with colleagues?
  - b. Again: trade union membership previously talked about?
  - c. Support by (Line) Management?
27. How do benefits and positive aspects of your current employment relate to negative changes in your work experience and working conditions?
- a. Do you feel that ultimately positives and negatives about your work are in balance?
  - b. Or do either positive or negative aspects predominate your experience of work?

28. If you were to make suggestions, what would you suggest that could be done that would have the biggest positive impact on your day to day work?

29. Thank you for your time and for speaking to me today.

## Appendix D Focus Group Guide - Firefighters

### Opening Questions

1. To begin with, could you each please tell me a bit about yourself:
  - a. Your name (will be anonymised) and age?
  - b. Education & when did you leave education?
  - c. Career – What profession did you take up when you left education? When did you join the service? Have you had previous roles within the private sector?

### Attractiveness of Job / Work in Public Services

2. Think back to when you joined the service, what was the appeal of joining?
3. In addition to what we just discussed, I have drawn together a list of items drawn together from other peoples' responses and suggestions from the literature. Please take a minute or so to read through the list and select as many as you like.

→Hand out 'appeal for joining' list (Job Resources Prompt Sheet)

4. To summarize all responses, please share your answers with the group.

→Summarize?

5. Is there anything else that has come to your mind as we were discussing your answers that was not yet included in either list?
6. Imagine you were to look for work today, what would be the most important features you would be looking for in your work? Would the list we have just discussed be any different? If so, how?

→Possibly probe on items from my list to clarify:

7. Sense of achievement – how often/under what circumstance do you get that from your work?

8. Which were you primarily attracted to:
  - a. Work in your profession
  - b. Work in the public services
  - c. Neither one in particular
  - d. Both
9. What aspects of your work do you enjoy the most?
10. Over the last four or so years, did you feel that what are important aspects of your work to you were fulfilled? If not, in your mind, what constrained this?
11. What aspects of your work do you enjoy the least? [change to demands] Has that changed at all in recent years?

## Demands

[try to establish what is 'normal' and what has changed, e.g. increased]

12. Are there any aspects of your work that you find demanding? [that require effort?]
13. Which ones have the biggest impact on you?
14. How have these affected you? [probes: stressed → how often would you feel stressed? How much so? think about work outside of work, physically or emotionally depleted, take time off sick/presenteering, considered changing place of work?]
15. What helps you in dealing with these?
16. In your opinion, have these changed at all in recent years? Or since you joined? How?

→ Hand out Demands list (Job Demands Prompt Sheet)

17. In addition to what we just discussed, please have a read through the following list and pick any items that you would add. Was there anything else on that list that we have not yet spoken about?

## Organisational Restructuring & Reforms

I would now like to talk about the organisational restructuring and other reforms that have affected the Scottish Fire and Rescue Sector.

18. What were the key reforms and changes to your work in the last five or so years that have affected you?
19. To what extent do you think has the organisational restructuring affected you? If any, what were the key changes for you?
20. How have these affected you?

## Changing tasks

### Home Fire Safety Visits

21. How much time do you spend on these? Do you have set targets?
22. What is your opinion on doing home fire safety visits?
23. If you were in charge, would there be anything that you would do differently? What would that be?

## Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest

1. Have the kinds of incidents that you get called out to changed at all? If so, how? How does this affect your job? Were there any changes to your job roles that we haven't yet spoken about?
2. What is your opinion on the Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest Initiative?
3. How do such initiatives relate to the reasons as to why you joined the service and aspects of your work that you enjoy that we previously talked about?

## Trade Union Membership

4. Are you members of the FBU/a trade union?
5. When did you join?
6. What were your reasons for joining?
7. Do you think that you benefit from being a member? [probe for collective outcomes such as national level bargaining of terms and conditions vs just legal protection/support]
8. Do you think that the union offers you support with regard to coping with some of the aforementioned demands, i.e. restructuring, new tasks?

## To Close

9. In the light of our discussion about your work and changes therein, how enthusiastic do you feel about your work?
10. Has your enthusiasm for any of the following changed at all over recent years?
  - a. Your work in your profession?
  - b. Your work in the service?
  - c. Your work in the public services?
11. Imagine you were in charge of all fire fighters/the Fire Chief, what would you change, if anything, about your work that would have the biggest positive impact on your day to day work?
12. Thank you very much for your time and for participating in my research! Is there anything that you would like to add to our conversation today?



## Appendix E Prompt Sheet – Job Resources

Think back to when you joined the fire service, what attracted you to do this? Please read fully through the below list and then select as many items as you like.

1. Terms and conditions, e.g.
  - a. Pension
  - b. Working time arrangements
  - c. Pay
  - d. Holidays
  - e. Sick pay
  - f. Other conditions?
2. Purpose of organisation & other features relating to the specific organisation?
3. Nature of job, e.g.
  - a. Stimulating work
  - b. Social aspect
  - c. Physical work
  - d. Emergency work
  - e. Reputation of the fire service and profession
4. Career paths, learning/training opportunities...?
5. To have a positive impact on society/communities?
6. The ability to help other people?
7. To work for the welfare of others?
8. To have a positive influence on reducing social inequalities?
9. To work for a cause bigger than myself?
10. To give (back) to society?
11. Feeling a sense of achievement from your work?
12. A belief that your profession is vital for society at large?
13. A calling?
14. The desire to work with a particular group of people?

## Appendix F Prompt Sheet - Job Demands

Please take a few minutes to read through the following items and pick the ones that you find to be demanding aspects of your employment:

1. Work load or work intensity?
  - a. Pace
  - b. Amount of work
  - c. Deadlines
  - d. Long hours/overtime
  - e. Not having enough time to do job as well as you would like
  - f. Insufficient time for breaks
  - g. Effort needed
  - h. Work patterns
  - i. Large amounts of additional paperwork
  - j. Total hours worked per week
  
2. Personal relationships/encounters at work? E.g. with:
  - a. Colleagues
  - b. Supervisors
  - c. Members of the public
  
3. Increased physical demands beyond what you would consider to be 'normal' in your profession?
  
4. Organisational change?
  - a. Information on change
  - b. Opportunity to participate in change-related decision making
  - c. Job security
  - d. Outsourcing
  - e. Rationalisation
  - f. Uncertainty
  - g. Cuts to other services with knock on effect
  
5. HR policies and practices
  - a. Performance monitoring and reviews
    - i. Targets and who sets them
  - b. Fair treatment
  - c. Feedback
  - d. Promotion opportunities & careers paths
  - e. Opportunities for learning

6. Any aspects of the tasks you carry out, e.g.
  - a. Complexity
  - b. Bureaucratic rules and procedures
  - c. Effort
  - d. Difficulty
  - e. Other?
7. Any aspects of your day to day work?
8. Any aspects of your job role?
  - a. Changes to the tasks you have to carry out as part of this?
9. Your work environment, e.g.
  - a. Work in the public services?
10. Any aspects of the organisation you work for?
  - a. Organisational culture?
  - b. Aspects of management & management styles
11. Changes affecting your T&C's?
12. Other? Please specify.

# Appendix G: Union Interviews – Fire and Rescue Case Study

[→ highlight that I am looking at wholetime frontline fire fighters]

## Introduction: Job Role & Career

1. What is your job title/role?
2. Could you please give me a brief summary of your education/career?  
[any of the following; if applicable]
  - a. How long have you been in your current role for?
  - b. Have you undergone any professional training/education?
  - c. For how long have you been with your current organisation?
  - d. For how long have you been working in the public services?
  - e. Have you had previous roles within the private sector?
3. What attracted you to:
  - a. Work in your profession [fire fighter]?
  - b. Work in the public services?

## Role within Union

4. Can you please tell me about your role and activities as a union official?
  - a. Since when have you been working for the union?
  - b. What attracted you to take this role on?
  - c. What tasks and duties does it entail?

5. [if in role pre-2013] What have been the key challenges within this role for you since 2013 and the organisational restructuring?
6. What further challenges do you foresee within your role over the next few years?
7. Within your position in the FBU, what were the main issues for wholetime fire fighters over recent years? What sort of issues do you spend most of your union time on dealing with?
8. As a senior union figure, what are your ambitions with regards to the Grey Book?

## Reforms and Organisational Restructuring

9. What were the key work-related changes for wholetime firefighters as a result of the amalgamation? [probes: HR policy changes? T&C Harmonisation? New operational system and extra roles?]
10. Could you please comment on changes in overall numbers of wholetime fire fighters? [5 watch duty system, resource based crewing model?]
11. What is your opinion on the out of hospital cardiac arrest initiative?
12. Are there any other additional roles that you are aware of that fire fighters will soon be taking on? [Probes: Marauding Arms Terrorist attacks, slips, trips and falls; → preventative?]
13. Training seems to be a major concern for a lot of fire fighters that I have spoken to. Are you aware of issues relating to training?
  - a. With a broadening role of fire fighters, how will this affect the skills set of operational staff with regards to maintaining this skills set? [probes on how training is delivered, changes in frequency and types of callouts]
14. Are there performance targets, e.g. surrounding home fire safeties?
15. Have you got any insights on what implications the culture plan or 'organisational transformation' plan, might have for frontline fire fighters?
16. What are the key dissatisfactions, if any, among firefighters that you are aware of? [probes: morale; feeling underpaid, undervalued, and

stressed]

- a. What are the main cited sources of stress amongst fire fighters?
  - b. How does this experience of stress manifest? Sick days? Presenteeing? Long term stress related absences? Physically or emotionally depleted? Considered changing place of work?
  - c. Changes in work intensity? [probes: think about work outside of work, work load and pace, insufficient time to complete tasks,...]
  - d. Are you aware of firefighters leaving the service? [probe: are some leaving to go back to their previous trade or any other jobs?]
17. In your mind, what are the most demanding aspects of the work as fire fighter beyond what would be considered normal within the profession? Have these changed at all over recent years? If so, how?
18. From your point of view, what aspects of their work have fire fighters disliked the most over recent years?
19. What aspects of their work do you think value fire fighters the most?
20. In your mind, has the enthusiasm of wholetime fire fighters changed at all in recent years with regards to:
- a. Work in their profession?
  - b. Work with the college?
  - c. Work in the public services?
21. In your mind, what helps fire fighters in dealing with demanding/negative aspects of their work?
22. If you were to make suggestions, what would you suggest that could be done that would have the biggest positive impact on WT fire fighters' day to day work?

*Thank you very much for your time and insights!*

# Appendix H: Management Interview Guides - FE Principals

## Introduction: Job role and career

1. Could you please give me a brief summary of your education/career?
  - a. How long have you been in your current role for?
  - b. What attracted you to be working in that role?
  - c. Have you undergone professional training/education?
  - d. For how long have you been with your current organisation?
  - e. For how long have you been working in the public services?
  - f. Have you had previous roles within the private sector? How does work in the public sector compare to work in the private sector?
2. What are your main responsibilities within your role?
3. What were the main challenges that you faced within your role in recent years?

## Reforms affecting the Scottish colleges sector

4. What are the main challenges colleges in Scotland face at the moment?
  - a. What contributed to these challenges/Where do these, in your mind, stem from?
  - b. Have these had any effects on lecturing staff?
5. How is FE different to other parts of the Scottish education sector?

6. How has the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act affected your work/the running of the college? [probes: *college governance through regional boards, multi college regions, regional strategic body awarding funding on regional basis, monitors college performance and quality*]
7. What is your opinion on the regionalisation of colleges in Scotland and other reforms as were set out in the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act?
8. The college underwent organisational restructuring in the form of a merger a few years ago – what has been your experience of this? [*Did you welcome the merger? What were the drivers? How was it decided and by whom? Key challenges? Positives? Negatives? How was this received by staff?*]
9. What implications did the reclassification of colleges to public bodies have for the college?
10. In your mind, how have changes to funding affected colleges in Scotland? [*move to new funding model under SFC – what implications, if any, does this have for the college? Mergers to make efficiency savings – will overall funding to the sector see a reduction? Has it reduced already? By how much? How has/will this affect(ed) academic staff?*]
11. Can you please tell me a bit about the outcome agreements which have been developed for the sector? Has there been an increase compared to previously in an emphasis on performance? How do you feel about this? How do you think your teaching staff feel about this?
12. Has there been a requirement to change performance [and quality] management? What changes did you need to do, if any? What is your opinion of these? How has this affected staff?
13. Is HR policy and practice at colleges in Scotland different in comparison to other parts of the public services or the private sector? [probe for professional nature of lecturing staff]

## Industrial Relations

14. How would you describe your relationship with the trade union-side here at college-level?
15. What is your opinion on the reinstatement of national-level bargaining to the FE sector?



16. What implications has the move to national-level bargaining had for your work?
17. How has the move to national-level bargaining affected terms and conditions of lecturing staff here?
18. What has been your experience of the dispute and Industrial Action taken by the EIS FELA union (May 2017 – ‘Honour the deal’)? What was Management’s response here?

## Reforms and lecturing staff

19. From your understanding, how have reforms to colleges resonated with lecturing staff?
20. In your mind, what are the main issues for discontent amongst lecturing staff, if any? Have these changed or intensified in recent years? What are the main demands lecturers have been facing in their roles in recent years? [probe from demand prompts and expansion of tasks?]
21. In your mind, do you think that there has been an intensification of work for FE lecturing staff? In your mind, what is the experience of lecturing staff here in that regard?
22. Have sickness absence levels at this college changed at all or increased/decreased? If increase, in your mind, what caused this? [probe: ill health, stress?]
23. In your mind, is stress an issue for lecturing staff here?
24. An EIS-FELA report has asserted a drop in morale among lecturing staff in FE. Is that something that has also come to your attention here? If yes, what are the sources cited for this? If not, what do you think distinguishes this college to be different?
25. In your mind, what aspects of their work enjoy lecturers the most?

## To close

26. What will be your key priorities within your role for the short-, middle- and long-term?

27. What further challenges and opportunities do you anticipate for the coming years?

28. Thank you very much for your time and for speaking to me. Is there anything that you would like to add?

[potential additional points to probe/ask: Redundancies? Voluntary severances?]

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