

Meeting the demands of graduates' work

From a higher education for employment to a higher
education for performance

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Abstract

There is a general consensus around the kinds of jobs graduates might be expected to progress into once they complete their university education. Teaching, law and journalism are regularly cited as classic examples of 'knowledge-based' occupations that comprise the kinds of abstract problems and non-standard tasks that require independently minded, creative, and highly educated workers. However, there is very little research exploring graduates' work post-graduation, and that which there is tends to focus on skill utilisation (i.e. the extent to which graduates in work are making use of the skills they developed at university) or the demand for, and deployment of, these 'graduate' skills in the labour market.

This study takes a different approach, asking what it is about a particular type of work that might mean that the people performing it would benefit from a higher education. It considers the following principal questions:

- What are the nature and demands of graduates' jobs?
- What shapes, enables and constrains these workers in the performance of their work?
- Does the skills-based employment-focused model of higher education, which governs current understanding of the relationship between higher education and work and the role it can and should play in preparing graduates to meet its demands, offer adequate preparation for these kinds of jobs?

The research explores these questions through qualitative interviews with solicitors, journalists and teachers. It draws on the findings from this empirical research to conduct a critical analysis of the assumptions about the relationship between work and higher education upon which the current conception and practice of this employment-focused higher education are based.

It finds that participants in all three occupations are required to exercise a large amount of discretion in the interpretation and performance of partially and imprecisely specified work tasks and situations, but that this discretion is mediated by their employment circumstances, and complicated by the uncertain and unpredictable nature and conditions of their work. Acting purposefully in these conditions of uncertainty is central to successful performance of these jobs, but extremely demanding of their occupants.

The discussion concludes that a skills-based, employment-focused higher education which takes a narrow, standardised view of graduates' work does not accurately represent the nature and demands these kinds of jobs make of the people performing them, and is thus inadequate to the task for preparing students for this kind of work. The understanding of work upon which it is based also limits imagination of any alternative conception of the role higher education might play in preparing students for their future employment. Yet the analyses also suggest that the opportunities and experiences afforded by academic study could make an extremely valuable contribution to graduates' ability to negotiate the challenges of work and employment. Drawing on understanding of the nature, conditions and demands of graduates' work developed through analysis of participants' descriptions of their performance, this thesis advocates the rejection of the priorities and focus of a higher education for employment guided by recruiters, and the development instead a higher education for performance that focuses on the knowledge and dispositions that will be of most value to students.

Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Abstract	ii
Contents	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Introducing the topic	1
The focus of this research	6
An outline of the thesis	7
Chapter 2: Understanding the relationship between higher education and graduates' work: a review of the literature	10
A higher education for employment: the employability and skills agenda	10
Understanding graduates' work	21
The changing nature of work	29
Conclusion	31
Chapter 3: Methodology	32
Towards a better understanding of the nature and demands of graduates' work	33
Generating data through qualitative interviews	36
Participants in the study	39
Qualitative interviews	48
Analysis and writing up	54
Conclusion	56
Chapter 4: The nature of participants' work	58
The character of journalists', teachers' and solicitors' work	58
The 'ideal' journalist, teacher and solicitor	72
Conclusion	84

Chapter 5: The conditions, obligations and performance of participants' work	86
Doing a 'good' job	86
Being a 'good' worker	98
The conditions and obligations of participants' work	109
Conclusion	117
Chapter 6: The composition of participants' jobs and their organisation of tasks and time	119
Number and variety of participants' activities	119
Intensity of work	124
Intensive and extensive work effort	131
'Managing' time	133
Blurred boundaries of skill	142
Blurred boundaries between work and life	145
Conclusion	146
Chapter 7: The demands of non-standard, discretionary work	148
The nature and conditions of participants' work	148
Uncertainty and insecurity in and of employment	153
The demands of participants' jobs	162
Conclusion	167
Chapter 8: Discussion: Taking complexity into account: from a higher education for employment to a higher education for performance	168
Meeting the demands of graduates' work: the challenge for higher education	168
Limitations of a skills-based model of higher education	173
Limitations of an employment-focused model of higher education	179
Re-thinking the relationship between higher education and work: towards a higher education for performance	185
Clarifying the opportunities afforded by an academic higher education	189

Conclusion	193
Chapter 9: Conclusion: contribution, limitations and implications	195
The aims of the research	195
Summary of the findings and conclusions described in this thesis	196
Contribution to understanding of graduates' work and to the development of a higher education for work	199
Limitations of the study	200
Implications and suggestions for future research	201
Concluding remarks	205
Appendices	206
Appendix 1: Composition of the sample	206
Appendix 2: Example of an email approaching a potential participant	209
Appendix 3: Example of an email clarifying the purpose of the research in response to a query from a potential participant	210
Appendix 4: Information sheet outlining the research	211
Appendix 5: Form used to confirm participant consented to being interviewed and to having the interview recorded	214
Appendix 6: Interview topic guide (journalists)	215
Bibliography	217

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis examines the nature and demands of the kinds of non-standard, discretionary work for which a higher education is considered valuable preparation. It draws on this analysis to evaluate the assumptions upon which policies that advocate a skills-based employment-focused higher education are based. The discussion describes the findings of empirical research on graduates' descriptions and experiences of, and views on, their work. It then draws on the insights developed through analysis of this data to explore how higher education might usefully contribute to graduates' development of abilities and dispositions conducive to the performance of these roles.

Introducing the topic

Debates about the purpose and practice of higher education are usually prompted by the publication of statistics that are perceived to point to some kind of crisis within the system (e.g. numbers of students entering higher education, numbers of unemployed graduates, numbers of graduate vacancies). Preoccupation with these outcomes, treated as indicators of institutional performance, limits debate on the possible purpose, aims or benefits and limitations of a higher education for work to attacks on, or a defence of, the status quo. This stifles broader discussion about what higher education is for, what it might consist of, or why it might be useful in the performance of a particular kind of work.

The issue of graduate underemployment (or over qualification) in particular attracts a lot of attention both inside and outside academia (Elias and Purcell, 2004a; Green and Zhu, 2010; Rowley, 2013; Sodha, 2013; O'Leary and Sloane, 2016). This is not a new phenomenon, with complaints about graduate underemployment registered as far back as the 16th century (Freedland, 2012). But while the issues of graduate under- and un-employment are important ones, focus on the definition of and demand for graduate jobs detracts from broader discussions about the role higher education might play in preparing people for work, determining that the discussion will be framed in such a way that it is only logical to conclude the universities should

be teaching students to meet the demands of jobs that happen to be available at that particular time. The implication of this is that universities should amend their aims and activities in order to meet the demands of all employers, rather than seek to understand the nature and demands of the types of work for which the kinds of opportunities offered by a higher education might be most valuable.

Higher education for economic growth

The nature of the debate on the relationship between higher education and work has been informed in no small part by higher education policy that has, for the last thirty years, sought to use education to drive economic growth. For Shattock (2008:185-186), this is the key to understanding why higher education is the way it is today:

Higher educationalists naturally see [changes to the system] as being essentially higher education centred, as reflecting policy concerns about the nature and purpose of British higher education... On the contrary... most of the changes were exogenously driven... formulated as a response to national needs that, it was thought, higher education could help to meet.

Since the 1980s, all UK governments, whether Conservative, Labour or Coalition, have argued that the UK is falling behind its competitors in an increasingly globalised economy because too few employees are equipped with the skills needed to perform 'high-skills' work (DES, 1987; DfES, 2003; BIS, 2009; Heseltine, 2012). The authenticity of this narrative has repeatedly been called into question, particularly its depiction of globalisation as a "rampant, uncontrollable" force (Bradley et al, 2000: 23; Mandelson, 2012), and its assumption that there will be an increase in the demand for high-skills workers (Bradley et al, 2000; Brown et al, 2011; Keep, 2013), but it remains a basic tenet of the political philosophy which continues to shape higher education policy today (BIS, 2012). Whether the reforms implemented by these governments were managerially or ideologically driven, from the 1980s onwards education policy came to be seen as part of, or even an alternative to, economic and industrial policy. The outcome has been a system of higher education that is closely associated with employment, and increasingly under the influence of businesses that employ large numbers of graduate employees and the employer organisations that represent them (e.g. CBI/UUK, 2009; CBI/NUS, 2011).

The high-skills narrative has been used to justify higher education reforms which have seen, among other things: the expansion of the university system, the introduction of foundation degree courses designed to meet the needs of employers, new performance indicators based on employment outcomes, and student loans and tuition fees in place of state subsidies and student grants. These reforms have not gone unchallenged, but despite, or perhaps because of, the existence of a substantial body of work devoted to evaluating the narrative used to justify these changes, less critical attention has been paid to the conceptions of work and education which inform the detail of these policies. In particular, the role businesses have been invited to play in identifying the capabilities needed to perform 'high skills' jobs, and the role higher education is expected to perform in preparing students for this kind of work has been neglected.

Businesses as experts: from higher education for economic growth to higher education for business

A key assumption underpinning contemporary higher education policy is that the needs of the economy can be met by supplying businesses with the kinds of employees they would like to recruit (Heseltine, 2012). The validity of this assumption is rarely challenged because it appears so reasonable, but it is worthy of scrutiny because it conflates two very different aspects of the economy: the provision of goods and services (and the work required to supply these), and the process of employment (i.e. the recruitment and appointment of people to jobs).

When universities first started to increase their intake of students in the 1960s, it was expected that the expansion of higher education would help the UK to achieve economic growth by enabling it to make the most of the talents of its citizens. In 1963 a committee commissioned by the government to review higher education published the Robbins Report, which contended that the purpose of higher education should be to develop educated men and women who could bring their expertise to bear in the "world of affairs" (Robbins, 1963: 6). While the committee acknowledged that employers would welcome the expansion of higher education, they made no reference to employers or businesses when describing or justifying their plans for the curriculum. Where they described how higher education would prepare students for work, the committee referred to the demands of occupations and careers, rather than those of employers or businesses.

In his 1976 speech to Ruskin College, James Callaghan argued that one of the goals of education was to “fit [children] to do a job of work”, but it was not until the 1980s that policymakers identified a need to “bring higher education institutions closer to the world of business” in order to ensure that the system was meeting employer demand for “highly qualified manpower” (Callaghan, 1976; DES, 1987: 2-7). Once the idea that higher education should be more closely aligned with the needs of business was established, it quickly became accepted that graduate employers should be consulted about all aspects of higher education policy, including the content of the curriculum. By the turn of the century, employers were being described as “the key definers of the skills needs of our economy, and the key beneficiaries of the skilled workers produced by higher education” (BIS, 2009: 14), and invited to help universities develop degrees that would equip students with the skills employers needed (DfES, 2003; FDF, 2007; DIUS, 2008). By the time the Coalition government published its response to the Browne Review in 2011, it was taken for granted that there should be “collaboration between institutions and employers in the design and delivery of courses” (BIS, 2011: 39). This acceptance of the reliability and value of the testimony of employers, and of the importance of inviting them to contribute to the development of higher education curricula, continues to inform higher education policy today (UUK/UKCES, 2014; Shadbolt, 2016).

Wolf (2002) suggests that nobody questioned the decision to assign business the role of ‘expert’ when seeking to understand how higher education might better prepare students for work because nobody else was deemed suitable for the role (educators being out of touch, and civil servants lacking the relevant experience). Policymakers turned to businesses on the grounds that they employed graduates and could therefore be considered to have expert knowledge of graduate labour. However, having experience of graduate recruitment and employment is not the same as having expert knowledge of graduate work, and the advice employers are able to provide has more to do with succeeding in the labour market than it does with performing high-skills work.

Often treated as offering an objective analysis of the employment system, the advice employers are able to offer is further limited by the fact that they can only draw on their experiences of employing graduate labour within their own organisations (Teichler, 2000). As a result, there has developed an expectation that graduates ought to be prepared for employment according to the needs of the

specific roles to which employers are currently recruiting (Boden and Nedeva, 2010). This has contributed to a further narrowing of understanding of the relationship between higher education and work, where preparing graduates for employment is equated with preparing them for particular kinds of occupational setting (usually those of large, multi-national organisations). Graduate employers and policymakers now expect universities to provide the kind of work-place training and socialisation that, until recently, was the responsibility of employers themselves.

The problem with relying on testimony of graduate employers is that, as businesses, these bodies are primarily concerned with maximising their employees' output (profits, services, products), not necessarily with understanding how they achieve these outcomes. A number of authors have also pointed out that businesses are unlikely to be able to reach a consensus about the kinds of abilities they are looking for because their expectations inevitably vary according to their business needs, and research suggests that they often struggle to identify what exactly it is that they think they need, or where the gaps in graduates' education actually are (Dearing, 1997; Atkins, 1999; Payne, 2008). Policymakers rely on businesses to advise them on how best to prepare students for graduate work because they recruit graduate employees, but while employers may be able to describe how they assess an applicant's ability to perform a particular role (through tests, interviews etc.), it does not follow that they are then able to explain *why* the applicant might be able to perform a particular role. If an employee is capable of performing the work, they remain in post and perhaps gain promotion within the organisation. If they are not, they are sacked, shuffled into a new position, or propped up by other members of staff. Person specifications, performance reviews and other recruitment and performance management tools are designed to make sure that employees are meeting employers' expectations in terms of their output; they are not designed to assess how or why employees are able to perform particular types of work.

Relying primarily on the testimony of the employers who recruit graduate labour (rather than the graduates who perform the work), policymakers have come to rely on an increasingly narrow understanding of the relationship between higher education and work, where 'work' is equated with 'employment' rather than the performance of tasks. It has also fostered the assumption that abilities required to perform high skills work are best understood as 'skills', itself a narrow, and contested, conceptualisation of work (Attewell, 1990).

Summary

Assumptions about the development and demands of the so-called knowledge economy have been used to justify a series of policy decisions which have reshaped higher education in the UK without any real understanding of what knowledge-based work actually is, or how higher education might prepare students to perform it (DfES, 2003; BIS, 2009). Instead, higher education institutions have been tasked with improving their graduates' employability by ensuring that students leave university equipped with the skills employers say they look for when seeking to fill graduate roles. As a result, researchers and policymakers have devoted a lot of time to examining the relationship between higher education and the labour market, but very little to exploring the relationship between higher education and the performance of work.

The focus of this research

The research described in this thesis examines the nature and demands of graduates' work with a view to developing a better understanding of the (possible) relationship between higher education and the kinds of non-standard, discretionary work for which a university education is widely believed to be valuable. In particular, it is concerned with exploring and imagining the contribution a higher education might make to supporting and facilitating the performance of this type of work, and with evaluating the validity of current higher education policy which considers a skills-based employment-focused higher education to offer adequate preparation for these kinds of 'knowledge-based' or 'high skills' roles.

There is very little research exploring graduates' work post-graduation, and that which there is tends to focus on skill utilisation (i.e. the extent to which graduates in work are making use of the skills they developed at university) or the demand for, and deployment of, these 'graduate' skills in the labour market. In most cases, these studies explore how graduates' work makes use of their higher education, rather than how higher education might prepare graduates for work. This study takes a different approach, asking what it is about a particular type of work that might mean that the people performing it would benefit from a higher education. It explores the following principal questions:

- What are the nature and demands of graduates' jobs?
- What shapes, enables and constrains these workers in the performance of their work?
- Does the skills-based employment-focused model of higher education, which governs current understanding of the relationship between higher education and work and the role it can and should play in preparing graduates to meet its demands, offer adequate preparation for these kinds of jobs?

The research explores these questions through qualitative interviews with solicitors, journalists and teachers, drawing on the findings from this empirical research to conduct a critical analysis of the assumptions about the relationship between work and higher education upon which the current conception and practice of an employment-focused higher education are based.

The interviews generated data on graduates' experience of performing these kinds of work, and explored participants' descriptions and experience of, and views on, the content, purpose and practice of these occupations. The choice of occupations was informed by the focus of the research, which was to evaluate understanding of the relationship between higher education and work as it is currently conceived in UK higher education policy. For this it was necessary to examine the kinds of jobs for which a higher education is considered useful preparation. Journalists, teachers and solicitors are examples of the kinds of roles that are held to comprise the types of non-standard, discretionary tasks that require the occupant to exercise the independent, creative thinking for which a higher education is considered valuable. Open to a large number of graduates, regardless of discipline, these roles offer 'ideal types' of work for which a higher education as conceived more broadly as a particular kind of education (as opposed to specialist knowledge of a particular discipline) might be considered useful preparation.

An outline of the thesis

This thesis describes the insights developed through the empirical research on the nature and demands of graduates' jobs and discusses the implications of these for understanding and imagination of the contribution higher education can make in preparing students for work.

Chapter two explores current understanding of the nature of graduates' jobs and the relationship between higher education and work. It examines the employability and skills agenda that underpins the employment-focused model of higher education that currently dominates UK higher education policy, and considers the implications of current debates and research on graduates' work for understanding of the demands of the kinds of jobs for which a higher education is expected to prepare people.

Chapter three describes the methodology underpinning the research, explaining the reasons for exploring the research questions through accounts of work generated by qualitative interviews with graduate workers. It describes some of the questions and challenges the researcher faced when designing and conducting the research, and gives reasons for the choices taken during the research process (e.g. the choice of research method and the sampling of participants), considering the implications of these decisions for the kinds of insights the study can offer.

Chapter four examines four main features of participants' work: their objectives, the anticipated product or outcome of the work, the realisation of these objectives and outcomes, and the criteria that guide their performance. It explores the different ways participants themselves understand their work, comparing their views with the objectives of their employer and considering the implications of any gaps between the two. The chapter concludes with a summary of the nature and key features of participants' work. These findings inform discussion of the conditions and demands of participants' work in subsequent chapters.

Chapter five discusses the conditions in which journalists, teachers and solicitors perform their work. It describes the means by which participants' performance is monitored and assessed, examining how their work is evaluated and by whom, and explores the managerial and collegiate relationships that inform participants' working practices, examining how these enable and constrain participants in their work. The chapter concludes by assessing how these mechanisms and relationships shape the obligations and conditions of work, and the implications of these for individual workers.

Chapter six examines the breadth of journalists', teachers' and solicitors' activities, the pace of their work and the length of their working day, and considers how the

relationship between their tasks and their time shapes participants' experience of performing these kinds of jobs.

Chapter seven draws together the findings described in the previous three chapters to consider their implications for understanding the demands of graduates' work. It begins by summarising the key features and conditions of participants' work before going on to examine participants' perceptions of the labour market, careers and paid employment in order to clarify the environment in which they are negotiating some of these challenges. It then discusses the demands performing this kind of work under these conditions makes of the individuals who occupy these jobs, considering the implications of these findings for understanding of graduates' work and the skills-based conception of work upon which existing conceptions of the relationship between higher education and employment are based.

Chapter eight discusses the implications of the findings described in previous chapters for understanding of the relationship between higher education and work. It identifies some of the most challenging features of participants' work and considers whether the skills-based employment-focused model that currently informs so much of higher education policy and practice is well-suited to preparing students to meet the demands of these jobs. It concludes that although academic education may be uniquely placed to make an important contribution to students' preparation for work, this can only be achieved by rejecting the priorities and focus of a higher education for employment guided by recruiters, and pursuing instead a higher education for performance that focuses on the knowledge and dispositions that will be of most value to students.

The thesis concludes with a summary of the research, and considers its implications (e.g. for policymakers, practitioners and researchers) and limitations. It also suggests some ways the ideas discussed might be developed or investigated further in the future.

Chapter 2

Understanding the relationship between higher education and graduates' work: a review of the literature

This chapter explores current understanding of the nature of graduates' jobs and the relationship between higher education and work. It examines the employability and skills agenda that underpins the idea of higher education for employment that currently dominates UK higher education policy, and considers the implications of current debates and research on graduates' work for understanding of the demands of the kinds of jobs for which a higher education is expected to prepare people.

A higher education for employment: the employability and skills agenda

From the educated person to the skilled employee

When the Robbins Report was published in 1963, the authors recommended that students should receive a broad undergraduate education, studying a number of subjects to a moderate level with a view to developing their "capacity to understand, to contemplate and to create" (Robbins, 1963: 8). This undergraduate education was to be supplemented by specialist postgraduate education or training, in which students would study one subject in more depth, or develop the occupational skills and knowledge necessary for a specific job. While acknowledging that "the maintenance of a competitive position depends to a much greater extent than ever before on skills demanding special training", the committee were clear that "what is taught should be taught in such a way as to promote the general powers of the mind" (Robbins, 1963: 6-7). For the Robbins committee (1963: 6), "the essential aim of a first degree course should be to teach the student how to think... the aim should be to produce not mere specialists, but rather cultivated men and women".

Most subsequent reviews of higher education refer back to the Robbins Report, but while the 1963 committee was concerned with providing students with a broad undergraduate education upon which they could build expertise in a specific occupation, the later reports advocated a much narrower undergraduate education, one which focused on developing specific skills rather than broadening the mind.

When the Dearing Report was published in 1997, its authors stated, “learning should be increasingly responsive to employment needs, and include the development of general skills, widely valued in employment” (Dearing, 1997: 9.1). They argued that graduates needed to be adaptable in order to maintain employment in an increasingly flexible economy, and identified four ‘key skills’ (communication skills, numeracy, the use of IT, and learning how to learn), which they believed were central to graduates’ success in the workplace. However, they also noted that “the advantages of employing people from higher education are more likely to be found in their thinking, learning and ‘technical’ skills (e.g. foreign languages), than in their ‘applied’ skills (e.g. working in a team) [or] in their preparation for work (e.g. understanding employers’ constraints)” (Dearing, 1997: Appendix 4, 2.5). For Dearing, undergraduate education was still primarily about developing a habit of learning, but this was to be supplemented by training in the ‘general skills’ required in work. Where the Robbins committee sought to distinguish between education to ‘promote the general powers of the mind’ and training in the skills for employment, the authors of the Dearing report sought to reconcile them. Ten years later, promoting the powers of the mind was all but forgotten as universities were re-labelled skills trainers rather than educators (Leitch, 2006), and public investment was directed towards subjects that could be relied upon to equip students with the skills and knowledge predicted to be in short supply in the future (Browne, 2010). Today, training in the skills required for employment is seen as an integral part of the academic curriculum, and higher education is primarily conceived of as a means of developing “work-ready” employees (Atkins, 1999; Andrews, 2013; Shadbolt, 2016; Wakeham, 2016).

‘Graduate skills’ are usually presented in the form of a list of individual items (CBI/UUK, 2009; CBI/NUS, 2011). Fallows and Steven (2000: 8) note that there is little consensus as to what ‘skill’ means in the context of higher education, except that they should be ‘transferable’ (i.e. students should develop them in higher education but be able to deploy them in work); ‘common’ (i.e. universal to all students regardless of discipline); ‘core’ (i.e. central to students’ experience of higher education); and ‘key’ (i.e. ‘unlock’ the door to employment). Some of the most commonly cited skills graduates are expected to ‘possess’ when they leave university include:

- Communication skills (e.g. ability to produce clear, structured written work; ability to listen to and question others)
- Interpersonal/team working skills (e.g. ability to co-operate with colleagues, persuade and negotiate, contribute to discussions)
- Commercial awareness (e.g. understanding of the need to provide customer satisfaction and build customer loyalty)
- Problem solving/decision making skills (e.g. ability to analyse facts and develop appropriate solutions)
- Self-management skills (e.g. flexibility, resilience, time management, being receptive to feedback)
- Information technology skills (e.g. ability to use software to create spreadsheets, ability to use email) (Fallows and Steven, 2000; Archer and Davidson, 2008; CBI/UUK, 2009; CBI/NUS, 2011; Lowden et al, 2011).

The degree to which the concept of skill can be considered a reliable and valid description of the kinds of intellectual, organisational and social activities included in the above list is hotly contested in the academic literature (Barrow, 1987; Hyland and Johnson, 1998; Hinchcliffe, 2002; Winch, 2008), but in higher education policy the definition and application of graduate skills and knowledge remains “largely unproblematised” (Quinlan, 2016:1048). One problem with this skills-based conception of higher education for employment is that it inhibits any discussion of the role higher education can or should play in the development of other kinds of abilities. Within the policy pertaining to higher education for work, all abilities are described as skills, regardless of their character, but the concept of skill is closely tied to notions of training and perfection through practice, and only minimally associated with understanding (Barrow, 1987). Barrow (1987) argues that one of the most insidious uses of the word ‘skill’ is as a way of describing intellectual abilities, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity, which cannot be understood only in terms of training and practice because they require understanding of the knowledge and context to which they are being applied. Researchers studying the way people use intellectual abilities at work agree, suggesting that that these abilities might be better understood as attitudes or dispositions rather than skills (Krupat et al, 2011).

Based primarily on the opinions of employers, academics, parents and students elicited by a series of independent reviews into higher education and work (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010; Wilson, 2012), the skills-based conception of higher education

for employment appears to have been developed in response to a perceived need to dictate what can be taught in universities, rather than in response to evidence about what might be useful in work. Empirical evidence from studies of work suggests that a skills-based higher education is likely to offer inadequate preparation for the types of non-standard, knowledge-based occupations, such as law or medicine, into which graduates are expected to progress (Eekelaar et al, 2000; Larsson et al, 2003), but policymakers have relied instead on evidence supplied by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, which itself relies on the testimonies of employers rather than workers (UKCES, 2011).

The skills-based conception of higher education developed in response to the perceived need to improve graduates' preparation for work, but is informed by experiences of recruitment rather than performance, and the nature of the relationship between the skills universities are expected to teach and the work graduates are expected to perform remains unclear. A further criticism of the skills-based higher education for employment is that, despite the development of lists of activities equated with generic graduate skills, there is little to no consensus amongst employers as to what they look for in graduate recruits (Wolf, 2002; Holmes, 2015; Shadbolt, 2016), primarily because when employers are asked what they want from their graduate employees they tend, perhaps understandably, to list skills and competencies that are highly firm or role specific (Wolf, 1998; Cranmer, 2006). Despite this lack of clarity, confidence in the validity of these two assumptions (that the abilities required to perform work for which a higher education might be beneficial are best understood as skills, and that work performance is best understood through employment) has contributed to the development of an agenda which has come to dominate higher education policy in the UK: employability.

Employability

The concept of employability is central to UK higher education policy. Universities are expected to publish evidence to prove they are 'delivering' it (HEFCE, 2010), and the term has become part of the everyday language used to discuss higher education in the public sphere, particularly in the media (e.g. Ratcliffe, 2013; Page, 2014; Venkataramakrishnan, 2016) and in material aimed at prospective students (Willetts, 2010). Employability is primarily concerned with graduates' access to, and the achievement of, employment (Sin and Neave, 2016). As a concept, it is highly contested, not least within the academic literature where there is on going debate

about the relative importance of 'absolute' and 'relative' employability in determining labour market success (Williams et al, 2015).

Much of the academic and policy literature exploring employability focuses on the development of 'generic' graduate skills or abilities, and is generated by authors seeking to make explicit the kinds of skills and knowledge graduates need in order to find and maintain employment. This work is informed by the definition of employability outlined by Hillage and Pollard (1998:1), which states "employability is about having the capability to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment if required". These authors are primarily concerned with identifying the skills, attributes and values employers are looking for (e.g. Hinchcliffe and Jolly, 2011; Durrani and Tariq, 2012; Wilton, 2014; Collet et al, 2015), developing policies and strategies to improve students' acquisition of these faculties (e.g. Barrie, 2004; Yorke and Knight, 2006a; 2006b; Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007; Rees et al, 2007; Pegg et al, 2012), and evaluating the impact these strategies have on graduate outcomes (e.g. Cranmer, 2006; Mason et al, 2009; Lee et al, 2014). Some contributors have sought to expand earlier primarily skills-based models of employability to include more of the features commonly associated with broader models of university education, re-interpreting these abilities as 'personal literacy', 'attributes', 'qualities', 'competencies' or 'understanding', but they remain underpinned by the view that the acquisition of a particular set of capabilities is the key to labour market success (e.g. Harvey, 2000; Yorke, 2006; 2010).

Critics of this attributes-based approach to employability can be divided into three groups. The first group question the conception of employability as absolute (i.e. that an individual is either employable, or they are not), arguing that the focus on the attributes possessed by the individual is misleading because it implies that graduates who possess the necessary skills or knowledge will always find employment. These critics argue that employability is relative, because graduates who possess the attributes required to secure a job may still find themselves unemployed if they are unable to access the labour market opportunities necessary to secure employment. They focus instead on graduates' experiences and expectations of the recruitment process, exploring how the social structure of the labour market, and the kind of competition this engenders, leads to inequalities in employment outcomes (Morley, 2001; Brown et al, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006). The second group argue that employability is best understood as a process through which graduates seek to persuade employers of

their suitability for a role (Holmes, 2001; 2013a; 2013b; 2015). These authors study the subjective nature of graduate employability, exploring how it is mediated through graduates' engagement with, and understanding of, the labour market, their own ability to secure and maintain employment, and the world of work (Tomlinson, 2005; 2007). To these two alternative approaches can be added a third, which seeks to reconcile the individual and structural features of employability, arguing that a more integrated approach which explores both the personal and the social and economic conditions informing employability would improve understanding of their impact on graduates' experience of and in the labour market (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005; Tholen, 2010; 2015).

Outside the academic literature, most commentators and policymakers are content to equate employability with skills, claiming that the debate about the relative nature of employability is irrelevant to discussions about the role higher education plays in helping students to develop employability, because universities can help students develop their absolute employability (their potential for employment), even if they are unable to help them secure employment itself (Yorke, 2006). On the surface this appears eminently reasonable: universities should help their students progress after their studies, in the same way that sixth-form colleges help pupils to decide what they want to do once they complete their A' Levels. However, few draw a distinction between a system of higher education where helping students to secure employment is the primary purpose of the academic curriculum, and one where helping graduates to secure employment is a secondary responsibility of institutions, yet these are two very different kinds of higher education. Similarly, while calls for policymakers to engage with a broader definition of employability than that which characterises the skills-based conception of higher education for employment raise awareness of the inequality and complexity of the graduate labour market (e.g. Tomlinson, 2012), the failure to distinguish between a) helping graduates to find a good job and succeed in their career and b) providing students with an education which may help them in the performance of their work has led to a system of higher education which prioritises helping graduates to secure their first post-university job above all else. In particular, a great deal of value is attached to the destinations data that records what graduates are doing six months after completing their course¹.

¹ See HESA (2016) for more details of this data.

The preoccupation with graduate employability is justified on the basis that employment is increasingly insecure and that graduate workers need to be more flexible in order to succeed in the labour market (CBI/UUK, 2009). It is therefore held that universities owe it to their students to ensure that they will see a return on their investment in higher education by equipping them with the skills they need to secure and maintain employment, particularly as this investment is financial as well as one of time and effort (Williams, 2013). However, this narrative disguises the fact that graduate employability is primarily about distinguishing yourself from other graduates seeking the same job; it is not about distinguishing graduates from non-graduates because graduates are considered to have already distinguished themselves from non-graduates by virtue of having a university education. Yet the discussion around employability implies that one of the distinguishing features of higher education is that it makes you 'more' employable (that is, more likely to get a job, any job), rather than employable in a particular field (able to perform a particular type of work), or able to access a different range of jobs. Claims that employability must be a key component of higher education because the economy requires educated workers imply a link between employability and productivity which again conflates those two very different aspects of the economy – recruitment and employment, and job content and performance.

In both academic and policy debates, then, the concept of employability dominates discussion about the relationship between higher education and work, locating it decisively within the context of the labour market. Research into absolute employability, which seeks to make practical recommendations as to the skills and practices universities should be teaching and adopting in order to meet the demands of employers, uncritically accepts the assumption that a) higher education can and should be about improving students' employability and b) that improving a student's employability (i.e. making them attractive to employers) is the best way to ensure graduates will contribute productively to the economy and society. While critics of skills-based conceptions of employability may not accept that the skills and attributes identified in these accounts are reliable indicators of the capabilities required to perform skilled work, or of the likelihood of securing employment, these authors rarely examine the assumptions underpinning this in any detail because their argument is with the understanding of employability as a means of securing employment, not with the understanding of work upon which the skills- and attributes-based model is based. Holmes (2013b), for example, draws a distinction between the relative nature of the concept of employability and the realist nature of

the concept of 'graduateness', but does not examine this concept any further because he is concerned with understanding of the way graduates find and secure employment, not with the benefits they have derived from their higher education.

Similarly, many authors make reference to the idea that skills are socially constructed and warrant further scrutiny (Homes, 2001; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006), but this observation is made within the context of a discussion about the subjective nature of employability, with few then going on to suggest alternative ways of understanding the capabilities students master during their higher education. Bridgstock (2009) is one of the few authors who makes explicit the relationship between employability and career development, arguing that employability is about helping graduates to proactively navigate the world of work and manage their career progress, by teaching them how to locate work, navigate labour markets, and identify and exploit career opportunities. However, while she criticises definitions of employability that associate it with the acquisition of generic skills, the author does not go on to question the underlying assumption that graduates will require these skills once they enter employment.

There is now a large literature exploring the relationship between higher education and the labour market, but few authors have explored the relationship between higher education and the performance of work. The dearth of research into the nature of work performed by graduates means the concept of employability has expanded to encompass all aspects of higher education, and now dominates much of the discussion about the contribution higher education might make to the economy, rather than just that pertaining to graduates' experiences of finding employment in the labour market. The focus on the relative importance of individual agency versus opportunity structures with regard to the role graduate employability plays in determining success in the labour market has meant that not enough critical attention has been paid to the assumptions made about the kinds of abilities graduates need to perform 'graduate' work, and the focus on employability further fosters the assumption that 'work' (or performing a job) and 'employment' (or securing and maintaining a job) are one and the same thing. While the circumstances of employment are likely to shape the nature of the work that is performed, and the nature of the work may inform the circumstances of employment, they are not the same, and a higher education which seeks to prepare graduates for one will not inevitably prepare graduates for the other. Studies of the graduate selection process, for example, have demonstrated how applicants are able to

impress recruiters by creating a convincing narrative of their employability, which is wholly independent of their ability to perform the role (Brown and Hesketh, 2004).

Within discussions of employability the purpose and content of higher education is rendered invisible, seen only in terms of its 'outcome' (the degree-level qualification), which itself is seen only within the context of the labour market (where it functions as a credential). Traditionally seen as an indicator that the holder has completed three or four years of academic study (Frijhoff, 1996), today degrees are valued for what they can buy, rather than what they represent (Nixon et al, 2011; Naidoo and Whitty, 2013). Even students themselves now struggle to distinguish between 'graduateness' (or the qualities which mark someone who has taken a degree course) and 'employability' (the ability to secure a job) (Glover et al, 2002; Tomlinson 2015; 2016). Despite the extensive literature on student experience and teaching and learning, higher education as an academic experience has become something of an enigma, something graduates 'just have' on their CV, along with their extracurricular activities (e.g. CBI/NUS, 2011). Along with the need to distinguish between work, employment and employability, is a need to re-visit the role of higher education itself.

What is the purpose of higher education with regard to work?

The skills-based conception of higher education for employment has long been criticised for taking a narrow, instrumental view of education (Nussbaum, 2009; Collini, 2010), and for fostering inequalities within the university system (Grubb and Lazerson, 2005; Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005; Boden and Nedeva, 2010) but few authors have sought to evaluate it on its own terms (that is, as a way of preparing graduates for a particular type of work).

Much criticism of current higher education policy is based on the idea that education should be seen as a public good, rather than a private investment (Collini, 2011; Walker, 2012). Sceptical of policies which conceive of universities "simply as engines of economic prosperity and as agencies for equipping future employees to earn higher salaries" (Collini, 2010: 25), critics argue that higher education has traditionally been, and should continue to be, about personal, not economic, development (Nussbaum, 2009; Collini, 2010; Walker and Boni, 2013). As critics opposed to these policies these authors do not seek to assess how well current policies meet their stated aims because they reject those aims in their entirety. Yet

higher education has always been associated with work in some form or another. In the Middle Ages, students attending universities like Bologna looked forward to “improved opportunities for appointment to rewarding public offices”, because, while the primary purpose of the university was intellectual training, “its latent function was the preparation of professional experts for practical affairs” (Rüegg, 1992: 21-23; Washer, 2007). The difference between higher education then and now is that, until the beginning of the 20th century, occupational training and socialisation were not expected to take place until after students had completed their scholarly education (Jarausch, 2004). Rejecting the idea that there might be some relationship between higher education and paid work altogether inhibits the imagination of alternatives to the skills-based conception of the relationship between higher education and employment that currently dominates this debate.

The literature on the unequal impact that policies prioritising skills and employability have had on different institutions raises slightly different concerns. Observing that elite universities with excellent reputations and healthy bank balances are more capable than other institutions of resisting pressure to conform to the employability agenda, these critics argue that those studying at elite institutions are likely to graduate with the social and cultural capital that will enable them to join the small, occupationally mobile elite, while those studying at institutions that have wholeheartedly embraced the skills and employability agenda are more likely to graduate with a highly specific skill-set and become one of a large mass of generic workers whom employers can easily retrain or replace (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005; Boden and Nedeva, 2010). However, their focus on social justice means that these authors are primarily concerned with the impact this inequality may have on students’ relationship with their education and their subsequent educational and labour market outcomes, rather than with the impact this agenda is having on the conception and imagination of the relationship between higher education and work itself².

A few authors have sought to reconcile the idea of education for work with education for personal development, but their approach has been more philosophical than

² Interestingly, recent research by McLean and Abbas (2009) and McLean et al (2013) has suggested that it might be more complicated than this, at least with regard to disciplinary content, as their research into sociological teaching across a variety of institutions found that content varied less across universities than might be supposed, with less prestigious universities actually more likely to preserve the core of the discipline through their use of more innovative methods of teaching.

evaluative. McArthur (2011a), for example, has argued that the problem with current higher education policy is not that higher education should not have an economic purpose, but that its economic purpose is currently conceptualised in a very narrow way. Both she and Winch (2002) are critical of policies which see education as a tool for business and prioritise the economic interests of a few large companies over those of society as a whole, but they remain convinced that higher education can and should play a role in preparing students for work.

A limitation of existing debate on the purpose of higher education is that outside of the literature on generic skills, there is actually very little discussion around the purpose and value of higher education in general, with much of the discussion concerning the value of particular subjects rather than the value of a tertiary education per se (e.g. Nussbaum, 2006; Lister, 2010; Garland, 2012; Kent, 2012). Barnett (2005; 2009) is one of the few authors to offer an alternative to the employment-focused model of higher education that considers what might or should be the universal benefits of a university education. He argues that higher education needs to prepare students to navigate a world of 'supercomplexity', in which questions and problems can never be fully resolved because there is no one 'correct' answer. For Barnett, the skills-based conception of higher education is setting students up for failure because it tries to impose more certainty onto the curriculum when students need to become more adept at dealing with less. He argues that what is actually required is a higher education that will help students to prosper in an uncertain and unpredictable world where the decisions and judgements they make will necessarily be partial and incomplete.

Barnett, along with McArthur and others, offers alternative ways of viewing higher education that draw attention to some of the assumptions underpinning current higher education policy that might otherwise have gone unnoticed (Barnett, 2009; McArthur, 2011a; 2012; Pring, 2012; Boni and Walker, 2013). However, as Kreber (2014a) points out, much of this existing literature lacks any theoretical or empirical basis for the singling out of particular attributes as being especially relevant in the modern world. With little empirical research with which to evaluate or develop these ideas, these philosophically informed alternatives to the skills-based model of higher education for employment are limited in the recommendations they can make to understanding and (re)-imagination of the relationship between higher education and work.

Summary

There are two problems with current debates around the purpose of higher education and its relationship to work. The first is that the discussion is dominated by a discourse of skills and employability, “which inevitably silences the debate around the purposes of higher education because it articulates its possibilities so precisely” (Molesworth et al, 2009: 278). While the ‘common-sense’ arguments used to justify the skills-based conception of higher education for employment are consistent and easy to understand, those put forward by its critics, who advocate ‘education for its own sake’, are often inconsistent and incoherent (Ashwin, 2012; Arora, 2015; Ashwin et al, 2015). The second, related, problem is that much of this debate is conducted at cross-purposes, with educationalists debating philosophies of education, while policymakers want to know how higher education might contribute to the wider economy. This has led to a general failure on the part of both parties to distinguish between debates about the educational and vocational purposes of education on the one hand, and discussions about academic and vocational learning on the other (Carr, 2009).

In seeking to understand how higher education might best prepare graduates for work, policymakers have relied almost entirely on evidence from graduate employers rather than graduate workers, but it is only by examining the nature of the work graduates are expected to perform that we can really understand how a higher education might help them in the performance of their roles.

Understanding graduates’ work

What is a ‘graduate job’?

Despite widespread use of the term in both academic and policy literature, and in the media, there is no agreed definition of a ‘graduate job’. Often used as shorthand for particular types of occupation (e.g. higher status jobs, jobs which recruit staff through graduate training schemes), the term is primarily used to describe roles in which it is expected that the people performing the work will be educated to degree-level, rather than to describe roles where experience of higher education is integral to the worker’s ability to perform the work. In a recent review of university-business collaboration, Wilson (2012: 67) observed that the definition of graduate

employment is highly contentious, but it is his query as to why “there are a number of professional positions that have not been classified as graduate level, yet these positions are populated by graduates” that goes to the very heart of the problem.

As more and more graduates enter the labour market, so more and more types of work are labelled as ‘graduate’ roles as employers recruit graduates to positions previously occupied by non-graduate employees. Under pressure to supply graduates who can be employed in these newly ‘graduate’ roles, universities then begin to offer more courses associated with this type of work, which provides further endorsement of their status as genuinely ‘graduate’ jobs. This complicates both the concept of a graduate job, and the concept of higher education itself, because it fails to take into the account the fact that while “it is possible that graduates do these jobs better than their non-graduate predecessors, it is also possible that they do not” (Keep and Mayhew, 2010: 568). Ambiguous and ideologically loaded, the term ‘graduate job’ is better understood as a description used by social actors, than as a concept or category of analysis, yet it continues to be used by government agencies, including the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE), to distinguish between ‘graduate’ and ‘non-graduate’ work (Watson, 2002).

There is a small literature on graduates’ experiences post-graduation, but these studies have tended to focus on graduates’ reflections on higher education with regard to their attitude towards lifelong learning (Brooks and Everett, 2009), or their personal and career development (Jenkins et al, 2001). The few studies exploring graduates’ experiences of work have focused on their experience of early career employment and socialisation into work (Holden and Hamblett, 2007; Clark et al, 2011; Wilton, 2011; Purcell et al, 2012), as opposed to their experience of work performance. Consistent with the priorities that currently inform government and university policies on higher education for employment, much of the research on the topic of graduate work has focused on students’ understanding of the labour market, their plans for the future, and the degree to which they have (or have not) participated in activities intended to improve their ability to secure ‘graduate’ jobs (e.g. extracurricular activities; employability modules; work experience), and their employment outcomes (Tomlinson, 2005; O’Regan, 2009; Stevenson and Clegg, 2011; Allen et al, 2013; Power et al, 2013; Roulin and Bangerter, 2013). Other authors contributing to the literature on employability have examined some of the conditions of graduates’ jobs, but have focused on the recruitment practices or

processes through which graduates access and secure their employment, rather than the conditions in which they perform their work tasks (e.g. Holmes, 2001; 2015; Hinchcliffe, 2013). These analyses are primarily concerned with the development (or rejection) of the graduate identities or narratives of employability that recruiters consider legitimate evidence of an applicant's ability to perform the role (e.g. Brown and Hesketh, 2004). With little empirical research exploring the nature and conditions of graduates' work, understanding of this work is primarily informed by the operational definitions devised by those seeking to record or study graduates' activities in the labour market, where a 'graduate job' is usually defined as one performed by a worker who is considered to be in a managerial or professional occupation, as delineated by the Standard Occupational Classification system (HECSU, 2015).

Some researchers have sought to improve upon this definition, seeking to create new classifications of graduate jobs by conducting research which asks graduate workers if they feel they need a degree to do their job (Elias and Purcell, 2004b), or assesses jobs in terms of their use of the knowledge and high level skills acquired through higher education (Elias and Purcell, 2013). However, this literature is again concerned with understanding the labour market rather than the demands jobs make of their occupants, and focuses primarily on understanding the relationship between the demand for and supply of graduate workers (and the implications of this for government policy) and on evaluation of the evidence upon which these assumptions are based, including analysis of the kinds of jobs graduates are progressing into and the ways in which these might be classified (e.g. graduate or non-graduate; traditional, modern, new) (Elias and Purcell 2004b; 2013; Tholen, 2013; Green and Henseke, 2014). Other studies seeking to develop an understanding of the demand for graduate skills similarly focus on skill utilisation (i.e. the extent to which graduates in work are making use of the skills they developed at university) or the demand for, and deployment of, these 'graduate' skills in the labour market (Purcell et al, 2004; Chillias, 2010; James et al, 2013; Luchinskaya, 2014).

The problem with this research with regard to the contribution it can make to understanding of the relationship between higher education and work is that it looks at graduate work from the perspective of higher education, not at higher education from the perspective of work. Rather than ask what it is about a particular type of work that might require the person performing it to be educated to a degree level,

these definitions assume that higher education imbues students with some kind of 'graduateness' (usually certain skills or types of knowledge) and defines as 'graduate jobs' those roles in which graduates are (or believe themselves to be) making use of these abilities. While this approach may be helpful to researchers seeking to assess graduates' experiences in the labour market (where some kind of system of classification is necessary to enable comparisons within and across cohorts), it is less helpful when it is applied to broader discussions about the nature and purpose of higher education and its relationship to work, because it seeks to understand graduate employment as it currently stands (e.g. where graduates who graduated last year are working now), as opposed to seeking to understand the nature of work with regard to how this knowledge might contribute to discussions about what higher education might be for (e.g. how best to prepare students studying now for their work in the future).

However, although conception of a graduate job remains poorly defined, there is a general consensus around some of the kinds of jobs graduates might be expected to progress into once they complete their university education. Often described as knowledge-based or professional occupations, these roles are commonly associated with performance of the kinds of non-standard, discretionary work for which a higher education is believed to be valuable.

The limitations of concepts of knowledge and professional occupation for understanding the nature and demands of graduates' work

Knowledge work

When Drucker first coined the term 'knowledge economy' in the 1960s, he was describing an economy in which industries "have as their business the production and distribution of knowledge and information rather than the production and distribution of objects" (Drucker, 1994: 166). Like many theorists seeking to better understand this type of work, Drucker sought to define knowledge work by comparing knowledge workers to their manual counterparts. Early definitions of knowledge work thus focused on the characteristics of the people considered to be performing this type of work, rather than the nature of the work itself (which was often referred to simply as non-standardised or abstract). Knowledge workers were described as autonomous, creative and innovative (Reich, 1992; Drucker, 1999a), but the nature of the work itself remained unclear. While some more recent studies

have sought to clarify the concept, describing knowledge work as a type of work where the basic task is thinking (Reinhardt et al, 2011), most continue to rely on broad definitions that equate knowledge work with other kinds of 'white collar' work (Ramirez and Nembhard, 2004).

In lieu of a clear conceptual definition of knowledge work, many researchers rely on proxies, such as the first three categories of the Standard Occupational Classification (managers, professionals and associate professionals), knowledge-based occupations (e.g. advertising, journalism, law) or sectors (pharmaceuticals, finance, education), or even educational attainment (university graduates are considered to be highly-skilled workers) when seeking to identify knowledge workers for empirical research (Suff and Reilly, 2005; Brinkley et al, 2009). Unfortunately, given the lack of clarity around the unique features of the concept as a category of work, these proxies cannot be considered reliable indicators of the phenomenon they are seeking to observe.

Most empirical research into knowledge work has been conducted by researchers seeking to develop a vocabulary with which to describe the different categories of knowledge work (and knowledge workers) by creating typologies of knowledge worker activities (e.g. analysing, disseminating, monitoring), roles (e.g. helper, organiser, analyst), and employment circumstances (e.g. contract status, hours of work, flexibility of work schedules) (Brinkley et al, 2009; Reinhardt et al, 2011). Usually conducted by researchers specialising in organisational or management research, these studies are primarily concerned with understanding how knowledge workers might be managed and deployed within organisations, rather than with the nature or demands of the work itself (e.g. Drucker, 1999b; Davenport, 2005).

'Knowledge worker' has thus become a catch-all term used to describe anyone who uses, creates, sells, disseminates, translates or analyses information in his or her work. Occupations in which knowledge plays a central role are not new (Cortada (1998) lists medical practitioners, lawyers, priests, professors, teachers and clerks as examples of knowledge workers who have existed for centuries), but while many authors can give multiple examples of contemporary knowledge workers (e.g. lawyers, doctors, teachers, advertising professionals), few can explain what exactly it is about these occupations that makes them good examples of this kind of work.

Rather than empirically examine these roles, authors have based their analyses of this work on their assumptions about its content and character (Darr and Warhurst, 2008). Consequently, having conducted a review of the literature, Pyöriä (2005) has concluded that 'knowledge work' must be considered an ideal type, rather than an empirical description or theoretical explanation of social reality. This lack of clarity regarding the nature of knowledge work makes it difficult to see how (or why) higher education might help to prepare people to perform this kind of work, and consequently limits the contribution this concept can make to understanding or imagination of this relationship. The concept of professional work is similarly limited.

Professional work

Although it became a subject of academic interest in the 20th century, the concept of the profession "derives from medieval or in some cases ancient origins" (Abbott, 1988: 3). Consequently a number of authors have argued that 'profession' as an occupational category is better understood as a 'folk concept' (i.e. a term used in everyday life, whose history is as important as its use) rather than an analytical concept (i.e. a tool for analysis) (Becker, 1970; Freidson, 1994; Watson, 2002). Rather than treating it as a description of particular type of work, these authors suggest that it is more accurate to describe the term profession (or professional work) as a symbol of the particular ideology and rationale that underpins the composition and status of the occupations designated in this way; "a standard to which [people] can compare [other] occupations in deciding their moral worth" (Becker, 1970: 96).

As with concepts of graduate jobs and knowledge work, there is no 'one' definition of a profession (Švarc (2016: 392) describes it as a "fluid and ephemeral concept"), with many of the features associated with this occupational group abstracted "from the experience of a few showcase professions such as nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxon law and medicine" (Freidson, 1994; Milburn, 2009; Evetts, 2013; Muzio et al, 2013: 702). Where early works on the professions sought to identify the features unique to this type of occupation, most recent research has rejected this approach, focusing on professionalism (i.e. the basis upon which particular occupations are assigned this particular status) and professionalisation (i.e. the way non-professional occupations seek to achieve professional status by adopting the ideologies and practices associated with this type of work) (Abbott, 1988; Saks, 2012; Evetts, 2013). Yet as Freidson (1994) has pointed out, moving the focus of

the debate away from the structure and attributes of a profession and towards the process of professionalisation has not solved the problem of definition, which remains ambiguous. As with the graduate job, the literature on professional work is primarily concerned with the occupational status and composition of jobs described as professions relative to other kinds of occupation, as opposed to the content or performance of jobs and the demands they make of their occupants. This focus on the way these occupations seek to legitimise and maintain their status means that these authors' understanding of higher education is concerned with the role it plays in legitimating, furthering and instructing new entrants into expert (disciplinary) knowledge, rather than with the purpose and practice of higher education as it might inform work performance (Abbott, 1988).

The term profession is commonly associated with the exclusive rights to, and application of, a particular abstract, specialised or expert knowledge acquired through the acquisition of formal qualifications (Chillas, 2010; Evetts, 2013). Abbott (1988: 35), for example, describes the tasks of the professions as "human problems amenable to expert service". Hughes (1963: 656) concurs observing, "professions profess. They profess to know better than others the nature of certain matters, and to know better than their clients what ails them or their affairs". This is consistent with the conception of the profession as a particular kind of occupation, on the basis that "what distinguishes occupations from one another is the specialised knowledge and skills required to perform different tasks in a division of labour" (Freidson, 1994: 7). In much the same way that research on graduate jobs is primarily concerned with the classification of work as a particular kind of occupation, so research on the professions is concerned with the means or mechanisms by which certain occupations might be designated professional jobs.

One problem with relying on these existing models of work (e.g. knowledge-based, professional) as a means of understanding graduates' jobs is that they consider the most demanding aspects of work to be those features they attribute particular value to (whether 'high level' skills, abstract expert knowledge, or autonomous governance), which means their description and explanations of the work to which they are applied is invariably informed by their compliance with or deviation from these particular models, rather than by an understanding of the particular features of this work in its own right. Given that there is very little consensus as to the precise nature and content of these forms of work, the literature on these concepts is likely to be more valuable as a means of identifying some of the features and conditions

of work that might be relevant to understanding of the demands of these kinds of work, rather than as indicator of their character or a tool for their analysis (Watson, 2002)³. In his discussion on the jurisdiction particular occupations have over certain problems, for example, Abbott (1988) observes that work tasks and problems do not have 'fixed' characteristics because their definition and resolution is dependent on a variety of variables, including the way that task is framed (he gives the example of 'the problem of alcohol' which is variously described as a moral and spiritual problem, and therefore the preserve of ministers; a legal problem, the preserve of lawyers and the police; and a psychological problem, the preserve of psychiatrists) and the context in which they are executed (e.g. the particular tools, technologies and knowledge that are available or popular at that particular time). Similarly, his three-part description of the construction of the professional task (to diagnose, to infer, and to treat) suggests that it might be useful to know what role graduates play in specifying the nature and outcome of their tasks, and in identifying and implementing the actions required to achieve these outcomes. The concept of professionalism as a particular model for organising work is similarly helpful in identifying some of the features that inform how work practice is governed, and the implications of these for the experience of those performing it (Hughes, 1963; Freidson, 1994; 2001; Muzio et al, 2011). Evetts (2013: 787), for example, draws a distinction between "organisational professionalism, [which] is a discourse of control used increasingly by managers" and "occupational professionalism, [which] is a discourse constructed within professional occupational groups and incorporates collegial authority".

Understanding of both knowledge-based and professional work is informed by an "occupation-driven analysis, ... which, curiously, [omits] analysis of work" (Darr and Warhurst, 2008: 26). This limits the contribution they can make to understanding of the nature and demands of this work. A more useful approach might be to conduct empirical research into some of the occupations assumed to comprise the kinds of knowledge-based, non-standard work for which a higher education is believed to be valuable in order to explore the nature and demands of this work as experienced by those who perform it.

³ Although as Chillas (2010: 106) points out, the professional project offers a useful explanation as to why occupations might seek to graduate, in that the stipulation "graduate entry may be used to enhance status or delineate occupational boundaries".

Summary

Neither the concept of graduate job, nor the concepts of knowledge or professional work offer the description of work performance necessary to furthering understanding of the demands of the kinds of non-standard, discretionary work into which graduates are expected to progress. This limits the contribution they can make to understanding of the substantive purpose of a general higher education for work (as opposed to the role the degree as a credential plays in legitimising the status of a particular occupation, or in instructing new entrants in the disciplinary or expert knowledge associated with a particular job). As Becker (1970: 103) argues:

A symbol which ignores so many important features of occupational life cannot provide adequate guide for professional activity. Professional education tends to build curricula and programs in ways suggested by the symbol and so fails to prepare its students for the world they will have to work in. Educators might perform a great service by working out a symbol more closely related to the realities of work life practitioners confront, a symbol which could provide an intelligible and workable moral guide in problematic situations.

Rather than focus on identifying the characteristics of a “graduate” job, it is perhaps more valuable to explore the nature of some of the jobs for which a higher education is considered to be useful in order to better understand the demands of these kinds of work and the role higher education might play in helping the occupants of these roles to meet them.

The changing nature of work

The vision of the knowledge economy sketched out by management theorists such as Drucker and Reich suggests that, whatever happens to the rest of the workforce, knowledge-based work will continue to be complex, non-standardised and highly demanding, and require highly-skilled, innovative, independent and creative workers. However, empirical research exploring the nature of work in which knowledge is the primary item of production suggests that this may not always be the case.

In the 1970s labour process theorists such as Braverman (1974) and Oppenheimer (1973) claimed that many high-skilled jobs would eventually become obsolete as employers sought to gain more control over the way employees performed their

work. These authors believed that, having successfully applied the principles of scientific management to manual work in the 1920s, it was only a matter of time before businesses began to apply them to high skills work as well. Devised by Frederick Taylor in the early 20th century, scientific management was designed to improve the productivity of workers by separating the conception and execution of work tasks in order to standardise and codify work practices and improve worker efficiency. While not everyone would go so far as to predict the wholesale proletarianisation of professionals (Oppenheimer, 1973), the issues these authors raised are of increasing concern to researchers exploring the experiences of educated workers seeking to adjust to the digital technologies and new styles of management which are re-shaping work in the 21st century (Hargreaves, 1994; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2008; Thompson and Smith, 2009; Witschge and Nygren, 2009; Brown et al, 2011; Campbell and Charlesworth, 2012; Carter and Stevenson, 2012).

Where some authors claim that new technologies pose a threat to the continued existence of non-standard, knowledge-based jobs in their current form, others remain unconvinced (or even more optimistic), arguing that such analyses are based on an incomplete understanding of the nature, demands and complexity of these kinds of work, a failure to differentiate between tasks and jobs, and a misunderstanding of the role technology has played in reshaping work in the past (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2011; Frey and Osborne, 2013; Autor, 2015; Susskind and Susskind, 2015). Other researchers have raised questions about the impact the changing nature of employment contracts is having on the work experiences and expectations of knowledge workers like university researchers (Harney et al, 2014) and journalists (Storey et al, 2005; Deuze, 2009), whose employment relationships are “increasingly based on individualised, short-term and contingent contracts, rather than on companies assuming some kind of formal responsibility for the permanent employment and career development of the worker” (Deuze, 2009: 90).

Understanding of the nature and conditions of the kinds of work graduates might progress into, then, remains the subject of fierce debate, with little consensus as to the demands this work might make of the people performing it.

Conclusion

At present, UK higher education policy conceives of the relationship between higher education and work as a relationship between higher education and employment. This understanding is underpinned by an increasingly simplistic conception of higher education for work, which sees work as the application of skills and knowledge, and higher education as the means by which these skills and knowledge are accrued. The evidence upon which this understanding is based is limited, comprising mainly of the accounts of managers or recruiters of organisations that regularly recruit a large number of graduates into their employ.

Consistent with this policy focus, the literature on higher education for work is concerned primarily with graduates' access to and acquisition of post-university employment, the skills and abilities employers are looking for in their graduate recruits, and the means by which higher education might equip students with these abilities. Research on graduates' work is similarly preoccupied with graduate employment and the labour market, with very few studies exploring the nature and performance of graduates' work. Those that do are concerned primarily with the deployment of graduate skills (i.e. the degree to which graduates are making use of the skills and knowledge they developed in higher education), rather than with the demands this work makes of the people performing it.

In order to address this gap, the research described in this thesis sought to evaluate this skills-based employment-focused conception of higher education for work on its own terms: that is, as preparation for the kinds of work for which a higher education is expected to be valuable. Where higher education policy relies on an increasingly simplified conception of graduates' work, this research reintroduces the complexity of performance into its analysis of the conditions and demands of these jobs by conducting empirical research to explore the nature and demands of graduates' work, and experience of its performance. The findings of this empirical research are used to critically assess the assumptions that underpin the skills-based, employment-focused model, and draws on the insights generated by this analysis to (re)-imagine what a higher education for work might usefully include.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The last chapter observed that there is very little research exploring graduates' work post-graduation, and that which there is tends to focus on skill utilisation (i.e. the extent to which graduates in work are making use of the skills they developed at university) or the demand for, and deployment of, these 'graduate' skills in the labour market. In most cases, these studies explore how graduates' work makes use of their higher education, rather than how higher education might prepare graduates for work.

This study takes a different approach, asking what it is about a particular type of work that might mean that the people performing it would benefit from a higher education. It explores the following questions:

- What are the nature and demands of graduates' jobs?
- What shapes, enables and constrains these workers in the performance of their work?
- Does the skills-based employment-focused model of higher education, which governs current understanding of the relationship between higher education and work and the role it can and should play in preparing graduates to meet its demands, offer adequate preparation for these kinds of jobs?

These questions were explored through qualitative interviews with solicitors, journalists and teachers, which generated data on the nature and challenges of their work tasks and the organisational and employment conditions in which they performed them. This analysis then informed a critical evaluation of the skills-based employment-focused model of higher education upon which current understanding of the role higher education can and should play in preparing students for work is based.

Towards a better understanding of the nature and demands of graduates' work

All research is partial. The questions asked, the way issues are framed, the methods used, all these decisions contribute to a particular view of the phenomenon being studied. They also bring with them different kinds of challenges. This research explores how graduates occupying the kinds of roles for which a higher education is expected to prepare them describe and understand their work in order to further understanding of the nature and demands of these roles, and considers the implications of this for the relationship between higher education and work more generally. It is interpretivist in its approach, in that it considers the ways in which people interpret and understand their work to be legitimate and reliable sources of information about the social reality of that work (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Mason, 1996; Hammersley, 2013). The decision to conduct qualitative interviews in order to generate these accounts is based on a particular understanding of social inquiry, namely: that interviews are a reliable way of generating data on the nature, content and experience of work; that the people who perform work offer a valuable source of information about that work; and that the accounts these interviews generate can contribute to understanding of the nature and demands of work (Rubin and Rubin 1995; Hammersley, 2008). The rationale behind these assumptions is explored in more detail below.

Generating data on the nature and demands of work

Some researchers argue that observations are the most reliable source of data (Becker & Greer, 1957). However, not all phenomena are observable, and different kinds of data are required to answer different kinds of questions, even when these questions pertain to the same general phenomenon (Trow, 1957). For example, researchers seeking to understand work as part of a wider organisational process might consider participant observation to be the best way of investigating how organisations operate because they want to see for themselves how practitioners act and interact in the workplace (Watson, 2011). This research, on the other hand, is concerned with exploring what workers themselves regard as the salient features and demands of their work, and for this “we would do well to ask them (rather than assume we know merely by observing their overt behaviour)” (Jones, 2004: 258). Qualitative interviews are one way of eliciting these insights.

Qualitative interviews are sometimes criticised for being an unreliable source of information about the social world because the data generated by these interactions is 'manufactured' and could therefore be considered of less value than 'naturally occurring' data, which offers a more comprehensive view of a particular phenomenon (Becker and Greer, 1957; Silverman, 2013). My own position is similar to those of Trow (1957) and Hammersley (2003; 2013), who argue that one method cannot be inherently superior to another because different kinds of information lend themselves to different kinds of investigation, but that it is therefore incumbent upon the researcher to make explicit their reasons for choosing one method over another. In this research, qualitative interviews were used to generate insights that would not otherwise be available to the researcher. Accounts of work are generated in everyday life (e.g. in job interviews, in one-to-one meetings with managers), but these interactions are informed by implicit assumptions about the nature and demands of work that make analysis of these features difficult. Consequently, one of the criticisms levelled at the interviews (that they inhibit the expression of views that might be expressed outside that encounter) can also apply to ordinary life, particularly in the workplace (Trow, 1957). To generate accounts of work in which the nature and demands of work was central to the discussion it was therefore necessary to create an encounter in which participants could be given space and time to reflect on work practices and experiences and to discuss their views (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012).

That accounts generated by interviews are constructed during that interaction does not invalidate their claim to be accurate or reliable representations of the social world, but it is important to be clear about what exactly the researcher is claiming they represent (Hammersley, 2003). One of the main criticisms of interviews is that they are treated as a way of getting inside a participant's head, enabling the researcher to 'view' their experiences and opinions from a third-person perspective (Potter and Hepburn, 2005; Silverman, 2013). This approach can lead researchers to treat interviewees as 'reporters' who can provide reliable accounts of events, feelings and attitudes they experienced in the past. However, it is possible to accept that participants are not repositories of information and still consider interviews to be a valid method of generating data if interviews are treated as encounters in which knowledge is created rather than excavated (Holstein and Gubrium, 1999; Baker, 2004; Gubrium et al, 2012). This position acknowledges that accounts generated in interviews are products of that interaction, but also allows that they are informed by

experiences of the social world outside that interaction (Miller and Glassner, 2004; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

This research treats the data generated by interviews as insights, rather than reports. These insights are of value because they are the views of people who have knowledge of the nature and demands of particular kinds of work, and can therefore be considered to have something to contribute to understanding of these phenomena. However, these insights do not exist independently of the interview; they are elicited rather than extracted. They contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of work by offering a particular perspective, one informed by the participants' own experience of its conditions and performance.

Much of the empirical research exploring the demands of work is commissioned by policymakers who are seeking to identify, measure and solve national problems such as 'skills gaps' (e.g. UKCES, 2016). This research views work as part of economic policy, and is primarily concerned with improving national prosperity and removing obstacles to productivity. Policymakers seeking a regional or national overview therefore look to those they consider to be reliable sources of information about obstacles to productivity (e.g. employer informants such as the AGR or the CBI⁴) to provide a partial overview of the recruitment and development needs of individual organisations, from which they can then extrapolate. This kind of research rarely seeks contributions from individual employees, and when it does, it is usually in response to questionnaires that have been designed to verify or quantify the evidence provided by other groups (e.g. employers).

This approach is limited in what it can tell you about the nature and demands of different kinds of work (and consequently in what it can tell you about the needs of different organisations and of society as a whole). In order to understand what kinds of workers the nation needs, it is necessary first to understand the demands work makes of these individuals, and in order to understand this, it is necessary to go beyond the recruitment and development practices of the organisations that employ them. The accounts of people performing this work are valuable because they add another dimension to understanding of work, and provide an alternative perspective to that of those engaged in recruitment or management. These voices are currently

⁴ Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR); Confederation of British Industry (CBI)

missing from discussions about the nature and demands of graduates' work and the implications of this for the purpose and practice of higher education.

However, the meanings workers ascribe to their work are not the only ones shaping their experience of the social world. Their work will also be informed by the ways in which their managers, colleagues, employers, regulatory bodies and others interpret and understand the purpose and nature of that work. Jobs do not 'exist' independently of the people who design, perform, and regulate them, and consequently any examination of the demands of a particular job must entail an examination of how that job is conceived by the various parties involved in, or benefiting from, its performance. Examination and comparison of the commonalities and differences present within and across these different accounts furthers understanding of how work is conceived, and what this might mean for the conceptions of work that inform policy in the future.

This research contends that the views of people who are performing a particular type of work are a legitimate and useful source of information about the nature and demands of that work, and that eliciting these views will further understanding of the ways in which this work can be understood, the relative value of different conceptions, and their implications for the relationship between higher education and work.

Generating data through qualitative interviews

In qualitative interviews, data is a product of the interaction between the researcher and the participant. In order to understand what this data represents, it is important to be clear about what this interaction entails and how this shapes the data that is produced.

Interviews as guided conversations

Qualitative interviews are sometimes described as 'guided conversations' because they exhibit many of the features present in ordinary conversation (e.g. participants take turns to speak, ask and respond to questions, seek clarification etc.), but, led by the researcher, follow a slightly different course (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 122). Describing interviews as 'guided conversations' or 'conversations with a purpose'

(Burgess, 1988: 137) is useful because it reminds us that accounts generated by interviews are shaped both by the questions asked, and also by what the participant thinks the interviewer is interested in (Hammersley, 2008).

In this research, participants were asked to discuss topics they were unlikely to have thought about, or at least to share views they may not have articulated before, which required them to think through these issues as they arose (a number of participants confirmed as much at the end of the interview, saying, for example, 'that made my brain work!' or 'I'm exhausted now!'). Analysis of the data generated by these interviews must therefore take into account the context in which comments were made (e.g. what went before, and what came after), and the way in which the questions asked shaped the responses given. This context is important in understanding what prompts contradictory or corroborating statements within and across accounts.

The novice and the expert

Two people participate in an interview: the researcher and the interviewee. Their expectations of the encounter play a role in shaping the accounts developed through this interaction, and these expectations are themselves informed by the way the interview is set up. In this research, the researcher was considered the 'expert' on the topic, in that they had a better understanding of the nature, scope and context of the research, but a 'novice' in the interview, where they were seeking to learn from the interviewee (Foley, 2012; Johnson and Rowlands, 2012). Conversely, the interviewee was considered to be a 'novice' in the topic, but the 'expert' in the field, because they had knowledge of performing different kinds of work and unique insight into their own experience of this work performance.

As a university-educated researcher who had worked for a number of years before embarking on a PhD, I shared a similar background to many of my interviewees (e.g. attending university after leaving school, pursuing further qualifications after completing an undergraduate degree, working in a 'professional' field), and also had some second-hand experience of the fields in which they now worked (e.g. acquaintances in all three occupations, some limited experience of legal and media work). Sharing characteristics with participants can help the researcher to develop a rapport with interviewees, which builds trust and helps both parties to feel more comfortable. However, over-identification with participants can inhibit the articulation

of what they might presume are implicit or shared understandings (Darlington and Scott, 2002; Atkinson et al, 2003; Talmage, 2012). In order to minimise this, I made a concerted effort to position myself as a novice in the field, encouraging participants to articulate fully things they might otherwise assume I already knew. This was particularly important when interviewing journalists, because their initial understanding of my research was often shaped by their understanding of the research they did in their own work (as illustrated by comments made by one participant who queried why I might be interested in how they came to be in their current role, saying “it’s all on my LinkedIn profile”). Encouraging interviewees to recognise themselves as the ‘experts’ in the encounter also “[gives them the chance to tell us] which of our interests and formulations make sense and nonsense to them” (Miller and Glassner, 2004: 130). I found that once we built up a rapport, participants were happy to disagree with or challenge my statements (e.g. if they felt I had misunderstood what they had said, or if I asked them for their views on a point raised in a previous interview and they felt differently), which was extremely valuable in creating conditions of mutual-investigation that generated rich data and ideas, and in enabling me to explore points of consensus and difference between different accounts.

However, although participants were ‘experts’ in the interview, their accounts were not considered to be representative of anything other than their own views on their experiences. One of the criticisms levelled at interviews by Potter and Hepburn (2005) is that participants tend to speak as representatives of the category from which they have been selected (e.g. a teacher speaking for all teachers), and that this goes unchallenged in analysis of interview data⁵. To say that teachers cannot provide an overview of teaching does not mean they cannot speak for themselves as teachers, and it is important to acknowledge that they are being interviewed *because* they are a teacher (rather than because they have knowledge of some other aspect of the social world, such as being a father) (Baker, 2004). In fact, their value as informants is precisely that “far from being merely a ‘report’...[their accounts display] a version of the local practical reasoning that members could use to describe [that phenomena]” (Baker, 2004: 171).

⁵ In fact, the participants I interviewed tended to qualify their insights by saying “I can only speak for myself, it might be completely different for someone in another (organisation, field, school)”.

Participants in the study

Sampling occupations: journalists, teachers and solicitors

The aim of the research was firstly: to understand the nature and demands of graduates' work, and secondly: to draw on this analysis to evaluate the skills-based conceptions of education and work that underpin the employment-focused model of higher education. Where higher education policy is increasingly based on an abstract, overly simplified conception of graduates' work (see chapter two), this research aimed to improve understanding of its nature and demands by generating narratives that took account of the complexity and variation of participants' experience and practice. Becker (2014: 14) describes this as the "looking for complications" model of research, in that it seeks to "improve generalisations by identifying new things to add to the grid of variable elements that helps us to understand any case of that kind".

In seeking to generate propositions about the general nature and demands of the kinds of jobs for which a higher education might prove useful, the research sought to generate data which would draw on the experiences of a variety of graduate workers whose insights which could usefully be compared and contrasted in order to identify points of similarity and difference (Glaser, 1965).

Glaser and Strauss (1967: 55-56) observe that:

Comparison groups provide... control over the two scales of generality: first, conceptual level, and second, population scope. [They] also provide simultaneous maximization and minimization of both the differences and similarities of data that bear on the categories being studied... The basic properties of a category [are] brought out by similarities, and by a few important differences found when maximising group differences... Maximising differences... increases the probability that the research will collect different and varied data bearing on a category, while yet finding strategic similarities among the groups... The sociologist does not look for negative cases... he searches for maximum differences among comparative groups in order to compare them on the basis of as many relevant diversities and similarities in the data as he can find.

Interviewing graduates in three occupations enabled me to minimise some differences while maximising others. Minimising the number of occupations contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the nature and demands of each occupation, which in turn informed understanding of similarities and

differences across the three occupations and facilitated the development of propositions regarding the generality and implications of these features. Maximising variation within each occupation (i.e. seeking a variety of perspectives from individuals occupying similar roles) generated insights on variation within occupations (e.g. the way similar features presented in different circumstances), contributing to a better understanding of the way roles were experienced and performed by their individual occupants.

Selection of occupations into which graduates from a wide variety of disciplines might progress

The choice of occupations was informed by the focus of the research, which was to evaluate understanding of the relationship between higher education and work as it is currently conceived in UK higher education policy. For this it was necessary to examine the kinds of jobs for which a higher education is considered useful preparation. One group of occupations commonly associated with higher education are those described as 'knowledge-based' roles, i.e. roles comprising the kinds of non-standard tasks that require the occupant to exercise a certain amount of discretion and independent thinking in their performance. Commonly cited examples of these kinds of jobs include: engineers, doctors, teachers, journalists, architects, and software developers. As the focus of the research was the relationship between work and higher education, as opposed to the relationship between work and a particular discipline, I decided to concentrate on occupations that drew graduates from a wide range of subjects and disciplines. The occupations of secondary school teacher, solicitor and journalist were chosen because they are open to a large number of graduates and access to these roles is not determined by the studying of a particular discipline at undergraduate level⁶. As such, these three occupations offer 'ideal types' of work for which a higher education (as conceived as a particular kind of educational experience, as opposed to the acquisition of expert knowledge in a particular discipline) might be considered useful preparation.

⁶ Although access is often subject to the possession of a postgraduate professional qualification, such as: the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE); Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL); Masters or Postgraduate Diploma in journalism accredited by the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NUJ) or the Broadcast Journalism Training Council (BJTC).

Evaluating skills-based conceptions of work and higher education

In the UK, higher education is predicated on the idea that employers need graduates to possess particular sets of skills if they are to contribute effectively in work. This skills-based conception of work is underpinned by an assumption that the possession of a particular set of skills (e.g. 'communication skills', 'interpersonal skills', 'problem-solving skills'), combined with the necessary occupational knowledge, is sufficient to perform work well. This vision of higher education takes a 'technical-rational' approach to work in that it assumes that workers apply their skills and knowledge to pre-determined problems and tasks; it does not view work as in any way uncertain or ambiguous (Holmes et al, 2012). However, it has been suggested that the non-standard, knowledge-based work for which university is expected to prepare people cannot be understood independently of the worker because their conception of the task necessarily determines how the work is performed (Sandberg and Pinnington, 2009; Loftus and Higgs, 2010). The privileging of the technical-rational conception of work has had an impact on understanding of the purpose (and necessity) of higher education as preparation for particular kinds of work, particularly in law, teaching and journalism. Where educators and members of these professions argue that solicitors, teachers and journalists need a 'good education' (by which they mean a higher education) to perform their work well (de Burgh, 2003; Carr, 2006; Floyd, 2010; Winch, 2012), policy makers and employers have claimed that the occupants of these roles need less academic education and more 'on-the-job' training, arguing that "there is no reason why you can't attain the same qualifications, without the degree, starting on-the-job training in an apprenticeship from day one" (Hancock, 2012; DfE/MoD, 2013; Greenslade, 2013)⁷.

In focusing on occupations currently facing challenges to their status and identity as jobs for which a higher education is a necessity/benefit, a challenge which explicitly questions the purpose and value of higher education as preparation for this kind of work, this research is able to draw on the conflicting conceptions of these roles to evaluate their value regarding understanding of the demands of these jobs, and imagination of the relationship between higher education and work.

⁷ Not that this debate is particularly new - see Pue (1989) for an example of the debate on the value attached to (and perceived suitability of) guild training vs. professional education for solicitors and barristers in the 1850s.

Sampling journalists, teachers and solicitors

This research is informed by the theories of purposeful and theoretical sampling outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Patton (1990) and Mason (1996). Purposeful sampling seeks to identify 'information-rich' cases that provide a detailed account of the object of study (Patton, 1990). Theoretical sampling takes a similar approach, in that cases are chosen for what they can say about the topic of interest, but while purposeful sampling advises researchers to take sampling decisions at the beginning of the study, theoretical sampling advocates a more flexible approach, in which sampling decisions are purposefully taken throughout the research process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Mason, 1996; Emmel, 2013). In theoretical sampling, sampling decisions are taken on the basis of the researchers' understanding of the variety of ways in which the sample could be made up, rather than on the basis of the kinds of pre-determined sets of categories quantitative researchers might use in probability or statistical sampling. This understanding develops along with the research. In this first approach, sampling is about working out where to look, rather than pre-judging what you might find (Finch and Mason, 1999). As Becker (2014: 13) puts it, "I wasn't measuring variables. I was looking for variables".

Theoretical sampling (i.e. seeking information-rich cases through an evolving sampling strategy) is consistent with the aims and premise of this research, which explores peoples' accounts of their work in order to further understanding of the nature and demands of work as it is understood by the people performing it⁸. In this case, participants were not considered to be representative of other people with the same characteristics, but were chosen because they enabled access to particular versions of the work of journalists, solicitors and teachers (Mason, 1996). Rather than seeking to make comparisons between the experiences of participants on the basis of their different characteristics, this research explores commonalities and differences within and across accounts offered by a whole range of participants in order to make sense of the nature and demands of this kind of work (Glaser, 1965).

Theoretical sampling is not the same as ad-hoc sampling; it is necessary to have a sampling strategy, even though that strategy is designed to be flexible. In this research, the sampling strategy was designed to promote variation in workers'

⁸ The way in which this understanding is developed through analysis of the data is discussed later in the chapter. This discussion outlines the role my interpretation of the idea of grounded theorising developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) played in assisting this analysis.

perspectives on the nature and demands of the work commonly performed by solicitors, teachers and journalists. Maximising participant variation enables the researcher to identify shared features of a particular phenomenon on the basis that commonalities between accounts are significant because they have emerged out of heterogeneity (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Patton 1990). In this study, maximising participant variation provided opportunities to explore commonalities and differences between accounts, informing understanding of, and providing context for, similarity and variation in the features and demands identified by participants.

Developing a sampling strategy

This research draws on the sampling strategy outlined by Finch and Mason (1999), who began by developing a set of preliminary sampling criteria according to the features they considered to be pertinent to their research questions, before using this criteria to inform the selection of a small number of interviewees. The researchers then drew on these interviews to review and refine their sampling criteria before selecting the next group of participants. These sampling decisions were taken throughout the research process, and were informed by researchers' developing understanding of the characteristics that were relevant to their study.

When deciding whom to sample, I drew on Rubin and Rubin (1995:69), who suggest thinking "of the research arena as a theater in the round", where the purpose of sampling is to locate interviewees with different vantage points who might offer alternative perspectives on the topic of interest. I began by reviewing existing accounts of journalism, teaching and law in the UK. These accounts included: ethnographic and academic studies (e.g. Hargreaves, 1994; Eekelaar et al, 2000; Granfield and Koenig, 2002-2003; Lewis et al, 2008; Tambini, 2010; Spyridou et al, 2013), autobiographies (e.g. Simpson, 2002; Marr, 2005), essays by practitioners (e.g. Glover, 1999), interviews with practitioners (e.g. 'how I became a teacher' series⁹), commentaries (e.g. contributions to BBC Radio 4's Law in Action and The Media Show programmes; Collinson, 2013), blogs and professional networks (e.g. the Guardian Teacher Network), and information provided by professional bodies (e.g. NUJ, NUT, The Law Society¹⁰). I also discussed my research with friends and acquaintances who had experience of these roles. My aim in exploring the different forms these occupations could take was to identify some of the features that

⁹ www.theguardian.com/education/series/how-i-became-a-teacher

¹⁰ National Union of Teachers (NUT); National Union of Journalists (NUJ)

characterised the different versions, and to use these to structure my preliminary sampling strategy. Examination of these different kinds of sociological, journalistic and anecdotal accounts helped me to develop my initial ideas regarding the kinds of comparisons I might make and the kinds of questions I might ask, and improved my sensitivity regarding the relevancy of these to participants' own experiences and to the focus of my research questions (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

My review indicated that one important source of variation within all three occupations was the nature of the employing organisation and the type of work in which the person specialised. For example, journalists can work in broadcasting, print or web journalism; they can work for national or local media outlets; they can report on different topics (e.g. local news, politics, technology, health) and in different ways (e.g. documentaries; radio bulletins; news articles; feature articles). Teachers teach different curriculum subjects; different types of school have different funding, governance and management arrangements. Solicitors can specialise in different kinds of law (e.g. commercial law, family law, litigation), work for different sizes of firm (e.g. some solicitors work for firms who have offices across the world; others for firms who have multiple offices across the UK, or one or two offices in a particular region) and deal with different kinds of client (e.g. businesses, members of the public). My preliminary criteria for sampling variety within these occupations were therefore structured around organisational and work experiences, namely: type of firm and law (solicitors); type of media, form of reporting and topic (journalists); and type of subject and school (teachers).

I wanted to include perspectives from people at different points in their career, so sought interviews with participants who were just starting out, as well as those who were on the verge of progressing, or had recently progressed, into more senior managerial roles (e.g. had just been appointed Partner). However, the focus of my research was on the experiences of those who were established solicitors, teachers and journalists (i.e. 'experts' on those roles), rather than recent graduates or those in leadership roles. Consequently, most of my participants were in their late twenties or early- to mid-thirties, and had attended university during the most recent period of university expansion (post-1992), which meant their experience of being a graduate was of being part of a much larger cohort than would have been the case for their

older or more senior colleagues¹¹. I interviewed a mix of men and women across each of the three occupations, but their inclusion was informed more by their occupational experience than their gender. It is worth noting that many of the participants interviewed, especially those who were further on in their career, had experience of a variety of organisational settings and contracts. However, while it was expected that participants' reflections on their work would be informed by their career histories, the sampling strategy was designed to generate variety in terms of participants' employment circumstances and specialisms at the time of the interview.

With theoretical sampling it is difficult to know at the outset how many cases you will need to examine (Bryman cited in Baker and Edwards, 2012). Patton (1990: 186) recommends "that qualitative sampling designs specify minimum samples based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study". In this research, sampling was guided by the wish to generate multiple accounts of work from a variety of perspectives, and focused on the variety of perspectives rather than the number of participants per se (Beitin, 2012). My initial estimate of the different perspectives I would need to include (based on my preliminary review of the ways in which experiences might vary within these occupations) was that I would need to generate a minimum of around ten accounts of each occupation. As the research progressed and I developed a better understanding of the features of work relevant to my research questions, and identified further variation within participants' experiences, this number was increased until I felt that I had generated a detailed account of participants' work that adequately represented the full range of views and experiences with regard to the focus of my research and the topics covered in the interviews (Baker and Edwards, 2012). As with much research, the maximum number of participants was governed by practical constraints, including time, resources and levels of participation, as well as theoretical concerns regarding the implications of the sample for the insight it offers on the topic of interest. The findings presented in this thesis are based on forty-eight interviews (fifteen with journalists, sixteen with solicitors, and seventeen with teachers) with participants whose occupational histories and current employment circumstances offered a wide range of perspectives on the nature and demands of the three occupations (please see appendix 1 for details of the sample).

¹¹ Estimates suggest that in the four years from 1988-1989, participation of under 21s in higher education in the UK increased from 17% to around 30% (Mayhew et al, 2004). Further increases during the mid-2000s saw participation of 18 year olds in higher education in England rise to 38% by 2011-2012 (HEFCE, 2013).

Theoretical sampling in practice: the example of journalists

I began by interviewing a small number of journalists across a variety of media and specialisms (e.g. a freelancer who pitched programmes to television; a staff journalist who worked for a national newspaper; a self-employed news reporter who worked across multiple local radio stations; a staff reporter who worked for a national broadcaster). These discussions confirmed that seeking variation across employment circumstances and media outlets was a useful way of accessing different perspectives, but also that participants' conceptions of the different versions of journalism could suggest a number of other categories which might add a useful dimension to my research. Some examples include: the difference between daily reporters, investigative reporters, and specialist reporters; the role of regulatory frameworks in shaping the work of broadcasters; the role of news agencies, both as employers and as suppliers of content; the difference between being a 'web journalist', and writing for the web in the course of another role. Sometimes these categories would be offered by the journalists themselves (e.g. 'I'm not sure if that would be the case for an investigative reporter'), but in most cases I began to develop a better understanding of the kinds of journalist it might be useful to interview as I developed a better understanding of the features and demands of the work. Decisions as to which participants to approach for subsequent interviews (which included a web journalist, a specialist reporter, and a journalist who worked for a news agency) were therefore informed by the understanding of work I had developed over the course of my first set of interviews.

Gaining access

I had originally planned to gain access to participants through professional associations such as the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), the National Union of Teachers (NUT), and The Law Society, or through university alumni departments. I felt this would enable me to contact participants more directly (albeit through an intermediary) than if I went through their employers (which may have led to participants being 'persuaded' by managers to participate, or feeling that they were being interviewed as 'employer representatives', rather than as members of a particular occupational group). While a small number of organisations and a few alumni departments were willing to publicise my research through their social networking sites, web pages or newsletters, these strategies did not yield many

participants, so, acknowledging that I would be unlikely to respond to this kind of invitation myself, I decided to approach individuals directly.

This strategy met with more success, as by approaching individuals directly I was able to explain exactly why I wanted to talk them in particular, as opposed to journalists, teachers or solicitors in general¹². I believe this also encouraged participants to take advantage of the opportunity to raise any queries they had about their involvement or the aims of the research before they committed to participating¹³. Identifying and approaching individual participants in this way was incredibly time-consuming, particularly as not everybody was able or willing to participate in an interview (although most did if they could), but it gave me far more control over my sample, as I was able to approach people whose employment circumstances and specialisms met my criteria. I only approached participants once, and did not contact them again if they did not respond to my invitation (in most cases those people who were unable or did not wish to participate replied to confirm that this was the case). In order to respect participants' privacy, I only approached people whose contact details were publicly available in a place where they might expect to be contacted in their capacity as a journalist, teacher or solicitor (e.g. on a company website, via a professional blog, on a professional networking site).

Potential participants were identified by reviewing the career information listed in personal profiles on company websites or professional networking sites (e.g. LinkedIn), and by searching for professional blogs, local news features etc. To focus my search, I looked for participants in particular areas (e.g. South Wales, North-West and South-West England, London), as these were the places I was most easily able to visit, and also the most likely to yield the range of participants I was looking for because they were home to a range of media outlets, schools, and law firms. However, I did not limit my search to any particular area, so approached and interviewed participants from across England and Wales.

¹² Please see appendix 2 for an example of an email inviting a journalist to participate in the study.

¹³ Please see appendix 3 for an example of an exchange clarifying the purpose of the research in response to a query from a participant.

Qualitative interviews

Structure and content of the interviews

Some interviewers elicit descriptions of work simply by inviting respondents to 'tell me about your job' (Terkel, 1975), while others invite respondents to describe their activities in order to develop an understanding of their attitudes towards a particular type of work (Oakley, 1974). In this study interviews were designed to generate accounts in which participants reflected on the nature and demands of their work, and the features of their working conditions and employment circumstances that shaped, enabled and constrained them in the performance of that work. I developed a topic guide that identified the areas I wished to cover during the course of the interviews, but the points and issues participants raised during the course of our discussion guided the way these topics were discussed (Johnson and Rowlands, 2012). This required me to take a flexible approach to the interview, and also to listen carefully to the points participants made in order to consider how best to pursue these lines of inquiry with regard to my research interests – whether by reformulating existing questions, or by re-orientating the discussion to give it a particular focus (Lillrank, 2012). This process became more focused as I developed a better understanding of (and sensitivity to) the kinds of features and experiences that were relevant to my research questions, and the relevance of my questions and topics to the experiences and concerns of my participants (Blumer, 1954).

The topic guide itself was informed by the approach outlined by Eekelaar et al (2000), who, in their study of family lawyers, encouraged participants to reflect on their work by asking them first to describe their practice, and then to discuss the various features of their work in more detail by making reference to the concrete examples of the kinds of activities they had previously described. I also sought out and examined cases where solicitors, teachers and journalists had been given the opportunity to present narratives of their work (e.g. in autobiographical programmes, books or articles such as the Secret Teacher articles in the Guardian newspaper) to get a sense of the kinds of features and issues participants themselves considered pertinent to their jobs in order to specify the kinds of broad questions and topics that might generate a comprehensive, holistic account of their work¹⁴.

¹⁴ Please see appendix 6 for details of the topic guide.

Of particular interest was the degree of discretion participants exercised in the performance of their work, and the implications of this for the demands their work made of them. Teachers, solicitors and journalists are regularly cited as classic examples of jobs dealing with the kinds of abstract problems and non-standard tasks that require independently minded, creative, and highly educated workers. However, a growing body of literature exploring the day-to-day experiences of the occupants of these roles suggests that some of the mechanisms that have been introduced to improve their productivity may be simultaneously eroding the skilled nature of these roles. Researchers exploring the experience of lecturers working in further education, for example, have argued that performance management mechanisms designed to improve educational attainment (such as league tables, targets, and, from September 2012, performance-related pay) are de-skilling the profession, as lecturers are increasingly expected to teach outside their specialism in order to achieve full-timetables in a drive to improve their productivity (Mather and Seifert, 2011; Mather et al, 2012). These authors used terms like 'factory production', 'McDonalds', and 'Stepford lecturers' to describe the highly regulated and controlled conditions under which they 'churn out' this standard educational product. Studies of teachers in Australia (Comber and Nixon, 2009) and America (Au, 2011) elicited similar descriptions, leading authors to argue that the standardisation of everything from tests to templates for feedback is creating a body of workers who are no longer responsible for planning their own classes or evaluating pupils' learning, and consequently have no need to maintain any expertise in their own subjects. Rather than scholars or teachers, these workers are reduced to being technicians or "delivery agents" (Lloyd and Payne, 2010: 6), who are expected to oversee the implementation of a curriculum designed by someone else.

Where teachers' work is being re-shaped by new managerial practices, journalists are coming under pressure to generate more content more quickly as news organisations compete with each other, and the internet, to meet the perceived demand for 24-hour news. As a result, they are increasingly likely to rely on press releases and news agencies for quick, cheap stories, which limits their critical engagement with the material and threatens to de-skill roles which traditionally required workers to be capable of analysis and investigation (Lewis et al, 2008; Dickinson et al, 2013). Advances in digital technologies, while theoretically offering journalists new creative opportunities, are instead leading to greater standardisation, through increased use of templates that dictate how stories are written (Witschge and Nygren, 2009). Even the more traditional graduate occupation of law may be

becoming increasingly standardised as legal work is broken up into more repetitive, less complex tasks to enable less-skilled employees to take on more of the work (Sherr, 2000). Described as the rise of 'production line firms' (Lawyer quoted in Sommerlad, 2001: 358), this development is considered to be a consequence of the commercialisation of legal work, where lawyers are seen less as legal professionals, and more as the customer-facing representatives of a service industry (Boon, 2005; Holmes et al, 2012).

However, while most authors would agree that advances in technology, new management practices, and concerns around profitability are re-shaping the nature of work, some argue that these changes are more complicated than the de-skilling thesis allows, particularly with regard to the role intensification of work plays in re-shaping the nature of the work itself. Research by Priestley et al (2012) and Wallace and Kang (2004), for example, found that, even when operating in similar work environments, under the same managerially-imposed constraints (e.g. targets for attainment, curriculum goals, performance indicators), teachers with different conceptions of their subject, their goals and their pupils taught the same curriculum in different ways. While administrators may seek to control teachers' work by colonising their time, controlling their workspaces, and imposing targets and guidelines, these mechanisms will not inevitably lead to standardisation if the nature of the work precludes this kind of codification (Hargreaves, 1994). Researchers studying the experiences of lawyers performing legal work have made a similar point, arguing that the reconfiguration of legal work is more subtle than traditional labour process theory would allow, as there is a limit to the level of control a third-party (such as a manager or employer organisation) can exercise over the performance of individual lawyers because the work itself cannot be divorced from the lawyer's own discretion and judgment (Eekelaar et al, 2000; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2008). Researchers who have interviewed journalists about their work have also pointed out that many consider themselves to have been en-skilled rather than de-skilled by the new technologies which have generated a demand for multi-skilled workers who can generate content for multiple platforms (using blogs, videos, podcasts etc.), as multi-skilled working offers them more variety in their work (Wallace, 2013). These studies suggest that, when researching the demands of work, it is necessary to distinguish between work intensification and work standardisation, because one does not inevitably lead to the other (Green, 2001).

Yet even where there may be limits to the roles employing organisations can play in directly structuring their employees' work, their policies may still shape work indirectly, by informing the conceptions workers have of the nature and requirements of their job, and of the personal risks they may be taking when translating measures of output into procedures for practice. Priestley et al (2012) concluded that teachers' own conceptions of their work shaped their practice, but they also observed that these conceptions were informed by the way teachers engaged with, and sought to implement, managerially-defined targets such as their school's attainment agenda. Similarly, Curran (1990: 120) coined the term "licensed autonomy" to describe how "journalists are allowed to be independent only as long as their independence is exercised in a form that conforms to the requirements of the employing organisation". In a recent study of secondary school teachers, Perryman et al (2011) also noted that an employee's ability to resist pressure to conform to managerial directives regarding their practice is often mediated by their ability to meet the targets set by managers, with those who are perceived as being successful largely left alone, while those who failed to meet these targets are more likely to see managers intervening in their work. Understanding the conditions of participants work was therefore central to understanding the nature of this work and the demands these jobs made of them, and to the interviews conducted for this research.

The interview process

Interviews began with a brief introduction to the project and confirmation of some of the information already communicated and elicited via email when setting up interviews (e.g. the purpose of my research; their current place of work and job role). Wiles et al (2007) suggest that, while it is useful to treat informed consent as an on-going process, participants are likely to become irritated if they are repeatedly bombarded with information about a study. In order to ensure participants were fully informed as to the purpose of the research before we began I briefly summarised the aim of my research, the kinds of questions I was interested in, the kinds of topics I would be asking about, and how the information generated during the interview would be treated and stored, and invited participants to ask questions about anything they were unsure about. I also made clear that participants were under no obligation to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with, and were free to

end the interview at any point. Participants then signed a consent form to confirm they were happy to participate in the interview, and for me to record the discussion¹⁵. Participants were then invited to describe how they came to be in their current role. Interviews went on to explore:

- The tasks participants perform and the tools they use in their work.
- The aim of their work and the purpose of a solicitor, teacher, or journalist.
- The kinds of knowledge and capabilities needed to perform this kind of work.
- The 'ideal' solicitor, teacher, or journalist.
- The role other people (e.g. managers, colleagues, clients, their employing organisations) play in shaping their work.
- The conditions of their work (e.g. mechanisms of performance assessment and management).

In framing topics and probes I tried to ask 'how' rather than 'why' questions, as advocated by Becker (1998) who argues that 'how' questions elicit more detailed answers without putting participants under pressure to justify themselves by giving a 'reason' for their answer.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) encourage self-evaluation at the end of interviews and, as with the sampling strategy, this practice led me to incorporate some of the themes and issues identified through earlier interviews into the questions posed in later ones. Despite doing much of the reflective work during the interview, the respondent is often missing in discussions about the interview as a social interaction so as part of my evaluation I often asked participants about their experience of the interview (Warren, 2012). Most indicated that they found the process interesting, but that thinking about and seeking to articulate their work experiences and views on these issues was hard work. Some questions or topics gave them an opportunity to voice views or concerns they already knew they had, but more often than not the discussion itself had generated or contributed to their reflections and ideas. This is consistent with my view that the interview encounter creates the conditions for the researcher and the interviewee to collaboratively generate data on the topic of

¹⁵ Please see appendix 5 for the consent form. Understanding of risks of participating in this study (to participants and to the researcher), and development of the action taken to ensure that this study mitigated these risks (e.g. information supplied in advance of the interview; the location of interviews) was informed by participation in Cardiff University's Research Ethics Review process, and by the guidance supplied by professional bodies e.g. the British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice.

interest (Talmage, 2012). In return, participants often asked me if their contribution had been helpful, or apologised for “rambling on” – particularly if they had initially expected the interview to be more of a question-and-answer process, rather than a more conversational discussion.

Interviews were deliberately informal, and usually lasted between an hour and an hour and a half, although a few lasted around two hours. Herzog (2012: 210) argues that the nature of the interview situation is negotiated in part “through the ‘logistical’ choices [the researcher and the participant] make or impose on each other”. I initially left the choice of time and location up to the participant, in part due to the voluntary nature of their participation, in that I felt it was only fair that the logistics of attending the interview should take up as little of their time and effort as possible, and also because I was interviewing participants from across England and Wales and so was often unfamiliar with their local area. I was also uncertain as to where participants would feel most comfortable talking about their work experiences, which was important to creating conditions in which we could easily converse in depth¹⁶. Given the choice, most participants chose to meet outside work (e.g. in a coffee shop over lunch), and the relaxed nature of these meetings suggests that participants were more comfortable talking about work outside of that environment than they might have been if I had met them ‘at work’. The main difference for me as an interviewer was that when visiting participants at their workplace I was the guest, and therefore less able to exercise any direction over the encounter until we had actually settled into the interview itself, whereas when I met participants in a café I usually arrived first and so was there to greet them. While these distinctions made little difference to the overall content and conversational tone and direction of the interview, it meant that the interview experience was slightly different, in some cases taking slightly longer to develop a rapport, particularly when interviews were conducted in an office environment in which there was a sense that the participant was pressed for time.

When I had come to the end of my questions, I always asked participants if there was anything we had not covered that they thought was important or that I should know about their work given my area of interest. This question generated a great

¹⁶ An unexpected consequence of my willingness to travel quite a distance to meet with them was that some participants became anxious as to whether their contribution would be worth the effort. Where I had thought that participants would prefer to be assured that I valued their contribution, in fact this just made them nervous. Confirmation that I was due to conduct other interviews during the course of my trip helped to mitigate this pressure.

deal of valuable discussion, particularly early on during the research process when I was developing my understanding of, and sensitivity to, the issues and features of work that would be most relevant to answering my research questions. However, although undirected by a particular question, the ideas and issues participants raised in response to this query were not spontaneous statements, but their informed observations subsequent to a detailed discussion about their work during which I had asked questions, probed answers and put forward ideas on the basis of my evolving understanding of their experience and views on their work.

Analysis and writing up

In analysing my data, I drew on the idea of grounded theorising developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The concept of grounded theory is often used to describe “an approach to data analysis in which theory has emerged from the data” (Bryman and Burgess, 1994: 6), but there is some disagreement as to what this process means or entails (Atkinson et al, 2003). Thomas and James (2006) have also raised concerns that too great a focus on the procedures associated with this type of analysis risks limiting rather than facilitating the interpretation of qualitative data. My approach to the authors’ ideas is perhaps closest to that described by Coffey and Atkinson (1996), Atkinson et al (2003) and Strübing (2007) in that I consider their suggested approach to be a practical way of working with empirical data “to have and to generate and to extend ideas” (Atkinson et al, 2003: 164). In this view, grounded theorising is not about generating theory from scratch, but about ensuring that the ideas and propositions developed are sensitive to the empirical data, and its relevance to and implications for understanding of the topic of interest (Blumer, 1954; Strübing, 2007). The development of these propositions is informed, but not led, by the researcher’s existing ideas on and understanding of the topic (which may be informed by a variety of sources, including personal experience as well as the ideas and concepts developed by others), and it is this that helps them to “go beyond the data” to develop the ideas that “have a life apart from the evidence that gave rise to them” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 36; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 139).

Drawing on this approach, I began by identifying and exploring the ideas, categories and concepts that were suggested by the empirical data, and then drew on the concepts and ideas suggested by the existing literature on these topics (e.g. on the

'ideal' teacher, solicitor, journalist; on work time and management control etc.) to further develop my ideas and understanding of these features (as described and explained by my participants) and their implications for my research questions. The insights were developed in part by comparing my own ideas and categories of analysis with those of other authors, which prompted me to identify and seek to understand and explain the similarities and differences between them (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). My analysis of the empirical data was also informed by the practice of "constant comparison" outlined by Glaser (1965) in that it was by making comparisons between the accounts of participants within and across the three occupations that I identified and then developed my propositions about the nature and demands of the different occupations, and the consistency and variation within and between them. I found this approach valuable because it helped me to "start thinking in terms of the full range of types or continua of the category, its dimensions, the conditions under which it is pronounced or minimised, its major consequences, the relation of the category to other categories, and the other properties of the category" (Glaser, 1965: 439).

Consistent with my understanding of qualitative interviews as a means of collaboratively generating data on the nature and demands of work, my analysis drew on two 'levels' of theory: "first, the common sense theories of actors... making sense of the world" (developed in collaboration with my participants in their interviews), "and secondly... theories of empirical social sciences [which seek to actively understand] what people 'do in the field' as well as the motives and causes behind these actions" (Mason, 1996; Strübing, 2007: 586).

This process sees data generation and analysis develop concurrently, and dialectically, with the identification, development and clarification of propositions about that data, and with understanding of the relationship between these propositions and other, existing ideas and theories on the topic. It became clear during interviews, for example, that I would need to pay attention to all the different aspects of participants' work – their tasks, their environment, their working relationships and conditions, their understanding of employment – that played a role in shaping their experience and practice if I was to understand the demands of their work and the impact these had on participants as individual workers. This insight informed subsequent interviews, as well as my understanding of my research questions, the nature of participants' work, and my initial ideas regarding the limitations of existing conceptions of work and higher education.

Quoting from participants' accounts

In the following discussion, quotations are used to illustrate points made in the discussion regarding commonality between accounts (e.g. consensus regarding the demands of the pace and quantity of work) and of variation across accounts (e.g. the different ways different participants viewed their roles and responsibilities). Quotes were chosen because they articulated the point in a particularly helpful or clear way. I have not identified individuals according to their type of work when quoting from their interviews, as this information is not relevant to my use of their account. I consider this to be consistent with my commitment to participants to respect the confidential nature of our conversation, and to protect their anonymity when reporting on the interview (Mason, 1996). This commitment was an important factor in allowing participants to speak freely about their current and previous employment experiences, and their plans for the future. However, in order to differentiate between speakers, each participant has been assigned a random letter and their occupation (journalist, solicitor, teacher) is also given. Further details of the composition of the sample as a whole are given in appendix 1, including information on the nature of participants' employing organisations, their specialism (e.g. subject, topic, field), and the consumers of their work (e.g. the type of client or pupil they worked with).

Conclusion

This study uses qualitative interviews to generate data on the nature of the work performed by journalists, solicitors and teachers by creating a series of accounts exploring the content, performance and demands of these roles. It contends that these accounts offer a valuable alternative to the perspectives of those who participate in these kinds of work in other ways (e.g. as employers, policymakers, managers), furthering understanding of the nature and demands of this kind of work. Analysis of these accounts contributed to the development of what Williams (2000: 215) describes as 'moderatum generalisations' about the nature and demands of participants' work, which in turn generated the insights that furthered my understanding of graduates' work and of the role higher education might play in

helping graduates to meet these challenges¹⁷. The following chapters describe the findings of this research, and its implications for understanding of higher education.

¹⁷ 'Moderatum generalisations' are propositions, as opposed to laws or probabilities (Williams, 2000; Payne and Williams, 2005).

Chapter 4

The nature of participants' work

This chapter describes the nature and premise of the tasks performed by journalists, teachers and solicitors to identify the key features of their work. This thesis is concerned with the demands of paid employment, which means the primary focus is the performance of work for which participants are being paid, the objectives and products of which are principally determined by their employer. This chapter examines four main features of participants' work: their objectives, the anticipated product or outcome of the work, the realisation of these objectives and outcomes, and the criteria that guide their performance. The purpose of this discussion is to clarify the nature of their work and to determine the degree to which these features, though specified by their employer in the first instance, require further interpretation by participants in the execution of the tasks to which they have been assigned. It explores the different ways participants themselves understand their work, comparing their views with the objectives of their employer and considering the implications of any gaps between the two. The chapter concludes with a summary of the nature and key features of participants' work. These findings inform discussion of the conditions and demands of work in subsequent chapters.

The character of journalists', teachers' and solicitors' work

The specification of tasks has profound implications for the nature of work because it is this that determines if, and what, decisions need to be taken before the work can be performed (Fox, 1974). Specific tasks are unambiguous; it is clear what needs to be done in order to achieve the desired outcome. Others are less precise; *something* (unspecified) needs to be done in order to achieve the desired outcome. This requires one or more decisions as to how to proceed before the task can be executed. Most jobs are a combination of more or less specific tasks and require some kind of decision-making, but some decisions are more complex and require more interpretation of organisational and task objectives and outcomes than others.

The imprecise specification of task objectives

Journalists are employed to produce 'content' for a particular audience. They describe their primary tasks as: finding and identifying stories, researching stories, and writing about and presenting stories. News organisations make money by supplying (or receive money in order to supply) stories to particular audiences. Most commercial media organisations generate revenue by charging audiences to access the content and/or selling advertising space. Consequently, the journalist's objective is to find and report on stories that will appeal to their employer's chosen audience, thus building a loyal following (including subscribers) that will attract advertisers. There is a consensus among participants as to the objective of their role, which is to inform their audience about news and current events in an interesting way. They have a general sense as to what the outcome of their work should look like, in that the content they deliver should be accurate and engaging. Their understanding of what this means for their own work is informed by their employer's perception of their audience and their editorial guidelines, and these shape the voice, language and style of presentation, as well as the choice of story, tone, angle and content. While news organisations have specific objectives with regard to the size of their audience, few participants cite this as being of direct concern to individual journalists. However, there is some indication that this is beginning to change as digital technology makes it easier for organisations to measure audience engagement according to the number of hits or comments a piece attracts on websites and social media.

"If I hear of a story, the first thing I need to do is assess whether I think it's interesting, and that is very much relative to what you consider to be interesting, but I'm told by the radio station that the people who listen to the station, our core demographic, are people in their thirties with a slight female bias, so I'm kind of aiming at women in their thirties. There is actually a description of our core listener, so she's married with kids, she likes doing x, y and z as activities, she's a big fan of reality TV, she's a big fan of exercise and fitness, and interested in health, especially of her family." [Journalist A]

Teachers are employed to develop pupils' knowledge of their subject. Their primary tasks include: presenting and explaining new information, and securing pupils' interest in, and understanding of, curriculum material. This involves facilitating activities that enable pupils to engage independently with information and ideas, asking and inviting questions, and identifying and correcting misunderstandings. In fulfilling this role, teachers engage in a wide range of supporting activities (including

providing pastoral support and delivering extracurricular activities). Unlike journalists, at least one of their objectives is quite specific – good exam results. However, this objective is only realised when teachers achieve the much less precise objective of developing pupils' subject knowledge and capacity for independent learning. Their work objectives are set by their school, strongly influenced by GCSE and A' level exam boards and government policy (regardless of the school's funding arrangements).

"It's about getting students to think for themselves... There's this keyword 'independent learners' in teaching, [that's] where the focus is now... we want to make students independent learners, rather than just passive receivers of information... they want students to learn for themselves and discuss and have opinions on things, less of the wrong or right answer. They want more creative thinking and making links between things." [Teacher A]

Solicitors describe their work as finding legal solutions to their clients' practical problems. Their main tasks include: identifying and understanding the nature of the problem, suggesting possible solutions, outlining the pros and cons of different courses of action, negotiating with other parties on behalf of their client, and drafting documents to enact the agreed solution. As with teachers, one of their objectives is quite specific in that they are expected to achieve financial targets (only a very few solicitors are not subject to these). However, as in teaching, this outcome is only realised when a solicitor achieves the much less precise objective of providing a useful solution to their client's problem.

In all three cases, objectives are specified, but their definition is imprecise. Participants describe their tasks in general terms (delivering interesting reports, engaging students, solving problems), and any specific targets (exam results, financial targets) are dependent on the successful achievement of these broader objectives. The most important features of these objectives, the ones that indicate the content the worker is expected to deliver, are abstract (interesting, engaging, useful) and require clarification before they can be acted upon. Direction is supplied through the description of required outcomes rather than the provision of sets of instructions. Clarification of these outcomes is strongly influenced by guidance from outside agencies (e.g. their employer, regulatory bodies), but again this guidance is descriptive rather than instructive (a general description of the audience, advice to act in the best interests of the client, a subject specification from an exam board).

The incomplete specification of task outcomes

In order to fulfil their obligations to their employer journalists are expected to deliver a specified amount of content. The substance of that content is determined by the choice and presentation of the story, and central to the choice and presentation of a story is whether that story is news and whether that news is interesting. Whether a story is news is relative; it depends if and how that story has been reported in the past and what else is going on that day. A story is considered interesting if it will be of interest to the people watching, listening or reading the report, and becomes more interesting as it becomes more relevant to the audience. Employers specify the nature and interests of their target audience because the organisation can (however broadly) describe the kind of person they want their coverage to appeal to. However, the precise nature of a 'target' story is unclear. Participants can only perform their work when decisions as to what to report and how to report on it have been taken. These decisions take into consideration the quantity and quality of the news material, as well as the quality and relevance of the story itself, and consequently have to be taken as the content is being produced (events considered news today may not be of interest tomorrow; the quality of the news material may improve over the course of the day as sources respond to enquiries for information). As a result, neither the participant nor their employer has a clear idea as to what the end product will look like until the relevant information becomes available and these decisions have been taken. The nature and contents of the product of their work (the news story itself) does not become known until it has actually been produced.

"[When I first get in at 5am] I look down the list [advisory bulletin received from the newswire overnight] and think... I don't care about [a foreign policy story], nothing new has happened there, I do care about schools, because our listeners are mums in their 30s with kids at primary school, I do care about ships sinking, because it's big and international, but I don't care too much... This morning I wasn't sure whether to lead on the whole ship thing or on schools and teachers because that's technically more target. The ship thing is good, but it's in a different country... After a while I started to get some local audio, so I put that story top because in my opinion it became more interesting, it became more target and interesting...it's not necessarily what I find interesting, it's my perception of what the audience finds interesting... There are other considerations about the weighting of a bulletin...if I have one story where I have in-quality audio, so I did face-to-face rather than over the phone, and another story where I don't have any audio at all I might put the story with in-quality audio [first] purely because it's got more content to deliver. But if that other story is huge and feels weird going [second], it has to go on top, but then I need to ask myself – why

don't I have audio for that story? So what am I going to do about that? Who am I going to call?" [Journalist A]

Unlike journalists, there is some specification of the content of teachers' work through the national curriculum and exam syllabuses. These outline what teachers are required to cover in their lessons, primarily in terms of what pupils are expected to know by the end of the course. These specifications are precise, but partial; they give few details as to what will be said or done in terms of the content of the lesson. In order to prepare lessons, teachers develop or draw on schemes of work, which are more detailed plans for teaching the components outlined in the syllabus. These schemes of work are developed by participants themselves, or by colleagues in their department. The exam board and government specify what pupils *should* have learned by the end of the module or syllabus (mediated to a greater and lesser extent by the school and/or teacher), but they cannot specify what pupils *will* have learned, because this is influenced by the capability and engagement of the pupil as well as the performance of the teacher. It is not known if and how pupils will respond to the material until they are faced with it, which means many decisions as to the presentation and explanation of material are taken when participants are planning, teaching and reviewing lessons, in response to the questions, understanding, and engagement of the pupils, and the composition of the class. Like journalists, the outcome of a teachers' work is inextricably linked with their production of that work because choices as to the interpretation and execution of tasks are necessarily dependent on the context in which they are being performed.

"It's the stuff you wouldn't write on the board, it isn't going to come up in the test, it's not on BBC Bitesize, but it needs to be brought in... I've got this one girl... and she would sit and try to read a book under the desk and all this sort of thing, but once I got her engaged with the politics side of it, [now] when she's revising for her exam she's written all over her revision guide 'I don't really understand this', 'I don't understand that', 'well what's the implication of this', and actually she's getting a lot out of that revision by being interested in the politics side of it. It doesn't work for everybody..." [Teacher B]

"I think there are roughly two types of students, there are students who do the work, and there are students who don't do the work... basically, that's it. So for the students who don't do the work, the task is getting them to do the work...and the issue there is figuring out what's stopping them from doing the work, what support do they need... there's no magic wand solution. For the students who are working, it's a case of channelling that to make sure it's as effective as possible, so they are doing what they need to do in order to make sure that they're advancing towards the goal they've got in mind." [Teacher C]

For solicitors, the end product of their work is the legal advice or solution they provide to their client. The character of this advice is broadly specified because solicitors tend to specialise in particular fields of law where they and their colleagues regularly deal with similar kinds of problems. A client seeking to pass their assets on to their family after death will be advised to prepare a will, a client seeking to protect their trademark will be advised on the strategies available to them, and a client seeking to create a financial product will be advised on the issues they need to consider and the protections they need to put in place. As in teaching, solicitors do not regularly create these legal products, strategies or protections from scratch. However, while these solutions exist independently of the client to whom they are presented, the final product of the solicitors' work, the content of the advice or legal solution, does not. This is because the content of the advice or solution is dependent on the priorities and circumstances of the client. Consequently, the precise nature of advice that is 'in the best interests of the client' is not known until the act of taking instructions and giving advice has begun.

"I think every transaction is different. Even when it is, on paper, the same transaction, it always comes out different. There's always some different underlying commercial issue that comes up...it just depends who you're dealing with." [Solicitor A]

"You've got to ascertain quite quickly what is the client after, what is their ideal outcome? ... You might have someone who just really hates the [plaintiff], and the outcome that they want from these proceedings is just that [the plaintiff] gets smashed... It's the client outcome, don't take it for granted, you know." [Solicitor B]

"I've drafted a document recently, so I've taken some of the things they've wanted and then other things we're suggesting, you know, 'this would be typical in this situation', 'this is what we think would be best here', and then it's for [the client] to review and say 'yeah, we're happy with that', 'no can you change that, actually we want this'. So basically it starts out as a working draft and then twenty-five versions later you've got the final product." [Solicitor C]

All three groups of participants are employed to deliver on the objectives specified by their employer, but the nature of that specification is imprecise, in part because the outcome of their work cannot be separated from the process of its production. In all three cases the final product (e.g. the legal advice, the pupils' learning, the news story) is not known until it is produced. When participants embark upon their work they know what they are expected to deliver, but not necessarily what it will look like. The most important features of participants' work objectives and products, the guidelines that determine exactly what they will deliver, remain unspecified until the

work is actually performed. It is a feature that distinguishes this kind of work from other kinds of work; particularly work where the end product is known in advance (e.g. the manufacture of a predesigned product), and it has implications for the organisation and management of this work, because interpretation is required in the performance of the task, as well as in the clarification of the task objectives. These interpretative decisions have to be taken at the time the work is performed; they cannot be taken in advance. However, although their incomplete specification requires participants to interpret these work objectives and processes, they are not free to interpret these as they wish. The objectives and guidelines outlined by employers or regulatory bodies might be an imprecise representation of their expectations and intentions, but they are nevertheless an expression of wishes as to what they expect the people they employ or regulate to do. The role their employers and other parties play in shaping participants' performance of their work is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

The dynamic process of production

The relationship between participants' work activities and the final product of their work is central to understanding the nature of their tasks. One feature common to all three occupations is the dynamic nature of their work, where the clarification of the outcome and performance of tasks is an on-going process.

Journalists' descriptions of the process of researching and reporting news items are broadly similar across broadcast, print and online journalism (although the methods of gathering and reporting news are changing as a result of new digital technologies). Once a story has been identified, participants conduct preliminary research, identify and interview sources, identify an angle or narrative, and write the story up as a news or feature article (if for a newspaper or website), or put together an audio or audio-visual package (if for a television or radio broadcast, or, increasingly, a website).

In theory, the process of identifying, researching and writing up news stories is the same for every news item. In practice it varies from story to story because it is necessarily shaped by the outcome of each of the activities that form the links in the chain of that process. Decisions have to be made as to where to look, who to call, and in what order, as well as what to ask, what to focus on, and what to write or say. These decisions are taken in response to events external to the process of producing the content, and they are accumulative in that one decision leads to,

shapes, and is shaped by, another. Who and what to ask is determined by the choice of story; what participants find is shaped by where they look; interviews are shaped by the responses people give to the questions they are asked; articles and scripts are informed by the outcome of this research. Decisions are taken not only at the start of the task when determining what to report on, but throughout the process of putting the report together. As a result, the process of generating news content is extremely unpredictable.

“I suppose it starts with phone bashing, so speaking to people who are influential or have a stake in an issue. And not being too prescriptive at the early stage, so talking to anyone and everyone about it, because you don’t know where the nuggets of the story might be... One thing I would say is that the programme you end up making is never the programme you think you’re going to make. That doesn’t mean it’s better or worse, most of the time it’s better, but you have to allow for... your direction to change... when you start looking at something and that opens up and you think ‘oh, actually, you know, that’s far more interesting’. So it’s not a straight line from beginning to end, you sort of meander all over the place.” [Journalist B]

“I’ll have lots of questions prepared, but very often you find the conversation often just goes off on a tangent, and it’s quite interesting, I think you have to be able to adapt to that rather than thinking ‘tick, next question’, you’ve got to be able to listen to what they’re telling you and react to that as well.” [Journalist C]

“It’s very hard [to pitch stories as a freelancer] because I think at the pitch stage... especially for something like a straightforward interview, like a profile feature, so when I said I was going to interview [high profile person], I didn’t know what was going to come out of that, I didn’t know what she was going to say, so it’s really hard to pitch an article other than going ‘do you want an interview with [this person]?’.” [Journalist D]

For teachers, the bulk of their work is concerned with planning and delivering lessons, assessing pupils’ work, and providing feedback on their performance. In terms of instructing pupils in their subject, the process of delivering lessons includes: introducing and describing information and ideas; explaining ideas; engaging pupils in the curriculum content and the learning process; facilitating activities that allow students to discuss ideas or put them into practice; and assessing understanding. Teachers have a clearer idea than journalists as to how their work will progress because the content and general structure of their lesson is specified in advance (e.g. in schemes of work or lesson plans informed by the criteria outlined by exam boards). However, once they have introduced the new content, most of the rest of their time is spent trying to get students to engage with the material and helping them to understand the new content by exploring and

explaining it, asking and answering questions about it, and facilitating criticism and discussion within the class. As with the writing of a news item, the process of instructing pupils in a subject is both interactive and reactive, with teachers responding to the queries, questions and misconceptions of their class.

“If they all come up with something wrong then I need to change what I’m doing, quickly, so I can just upload something else, or say, ‘ok, scrap that, I’m on the board again...’” [Teacher B]

“There’s nothing worse, from the students’ point of view, than having a teacher who says ‘I don’t know the answer to that’. Mine were looking at inherited diseases and genetic diseases today, and were so fascinated by [the topic]... and asking really in-depth questions... The first time I was teaching it, I was like ‘why are you even asking this?’.... I even resorted to that sin of ‘well it’s not on the syllabus, so we’re not going to talk about it’ and trying to quash their enthusiasm... You also have to know when you’re running out of time and it’s time to bring them back round, or try to redirect that enthusiasm back into the questions that you want them to ask, rather than letting them run wild with a topic... develop that circular argument for them, and get them back on topic.” [Teacher D]

“The worst teachers I’ve ever seen are the ones who can’t think quickly. They get asked something, and they don’t know and they’re stumped... I had a colleague who was exactly like that, just got confused with things, and as soon as that happened the kids used to jump on it... That’s a really important thing, thinking quickly.” [Teacher E]

“[On using PowerPoint presentations] What I do quite a lot is you can freeze what’s on the board while they’re doing something, because you’ve had a change of idea because of something someone said, and then you can do a bit of typing and the slide is different from how you originally conceived it... I think what commonly happens is I don’t get through everything I was going to do... I’m quite open about saying ‘I’m just going to rewrite this question’, ‘I’m going to rewrite this instruction’. Or I change the homework because I realise we haven’t done enough to help them do the homework, I would just there and then re-type the slide... I often find, particularly for Year 7, the younger ones, things take a lot longer than I think they’re going to and I’ve been quite ambitious in my lesson planning and suddenly realise I’ve got to go right back and set a simpler homework.” [Teacher F]

For solicitors, the process of giving advice to clients includes: meeting or corresponding with the client to clarify the problem, the nature of the advice the solicitor can offer and the costs associated with this; confirming their instruction by the client; proposing a solution (or series of alternative solutions) on the basis of their existing knowledge or subsequent research; outlining the nature and benefits or limitations of these solutions; taking instructions from the client as to their preferred course of action; and acting upon those instructions in consultation with

the client. The dialogue between the solicitor and their client is central to the clarification, outcome and progression of the task, in that these discussions (both at the outset, and during the course of the task) are what move the work along. The content and outcome of these discussions is unpredictable because it is shaped by the requirements, motivations and circumstances of the client. As for journalists, each stage of the process is subject to the decisions taken at the previous stage, which means that while the process of giving advice is similar across all cases, the outcome for each stage of that process varies, and the cumulative effect of all these variations is that the practice of giving advice is slightly different every time.

“Every [case] is completely different, and I’m often frustrated and question why it should be different when actually a lot of these structures should be very similar because essentially a lot of them are doing the same thing, but it’s just amazing how... in each situation somebody wants something different, and as soon as they start thinking about one thing it leads onto something else that is different.” [Solicitor C]

“They’ll be a lot of issues that will crop up that you’ve got to be able to deal with... it might be that, I don’t know, husband empties the bank account and you’ve got to apply for an injunction to get it returned... I’ve had cases where there’s been contact [between the parties] and then somebody has suggested they’re going to run off to another country and then you have to deal with that.” [Solicitor D]

“It’s like sitting an exam every day, because you’ll have a new matter come into the office and you’ll be plodding along with all the work and be thinking ‘oh yes, this is quite a good matter and it seems fairly straightforward’, and then all of a sudden something will happen and it’s turned into something more complicated, and it happens a lot.” [Solicitor E]

All three groups of participants repeat broadly similar patterns of work in terms of the processes they follow and the type of activities they perform, but the nature of these processes and activities (e.g. interactive, shared with and informed by external agencies and events) means that the outcome of each cycle is rarely the same twice. Consequently the practice of performing the work is more variable than might be expected were the analysis only to take into account the process itself, which in many ways comprises a fairly repetitive sequence of activities. One reason for this variability is the interactive nature of all three occupations, where tasks are necessarily shaped by events and the decisions and activities of people outside the participants’ (and their employer’s) control. It is also due to the demands of performing tasks that evolve and change as they are performed, where the final product grows out of, and is shaped by, the series of events and decisions that take

place in the newsroom, the classroom, and the meeting room. The unpredictable nature of participants' work offers some explanation as to why only some features can be specified by their employer in advance.

The uncertain premise and unpredictable context of their work

Journalists are employed to produce news stories that will be of interest to a target audience, but the definition of 'news' and of a 'target story' are fluid rather than fixed; they are matters of opinion rather than fact (Lester, 1980). There is no 'correct' answer to the question: is this a target news story? While media organisations provide some indication of participants' target audience (e.g. women in their 30s with two small children and an interest in health, education and celebrities), the nature of this specification is imprecise enough to leave those taking decisions (as well as those assessing the decisions taken) on the basis of these criteria unsure as to the validity of their choices.

"[On deciding what to report on] Well, it's difficult to say really. A lot of my stories come from council agendas, so it's stuff that is happening, so I would usually pick up on what things were of interest to our listeners: social care; something where one of our councils is either doing something new or different; things that are going to affect a large number of people; things that we know are already issues for our listeners. So quite often a lot of stuff that happens in the countryside, traffic things are big things for our listeners - anything that comes up that's going to impact on that becomes a story. Anything with a really strong human emotional pull to it makes a good story. So it's kind of just thinking about what is interesting - and trying to hive off the things that are interesting to me because I'm immersed in lots of council detail, but would not be interesting to anybody else is quite difficult. I'm not sure I can tell you why exactly." [Journalist E]

"Gosh, what is a good story, what is a good story? A good story is something that's unusual, well actually there are lots of things that make a good story, but I think to me a good story is something that's unusual, makes someone angry, or makes someone happy, or there's some sort of injustice, or it's something that affects, just, everyone... I'm just trying... you just sort of know it. I think it's the sort of thing, it's a bit like someone saying what makes a good joke, there's not one element that makes a good joke, it's a combination... I suppose you tailor it to different audiences, it's something that's maybe a bit quirky... but also the way it's told makes a difference as well. So I think, even if you had the best story in the world, if you don't tell it well, you know, and also you can have an average story, but if you tell it really well, that's... So...yeah, characters, something unusual, something relevant, something that affects lots of people, something timely, yeah, all those types of things really." [Journalist F]

In teaching, there is no clear relationship between a particular set of working practices and a successful outcome in terms of pupils' learning. Regulatory bodies, schools and teachers prefer some strategies and curricula over others, but the contested nature of education means that for all the perceived certainty around the curriculum and the preferred means of teaching it, they both change on a fairly regular basis, usually with every change of government (Donnelly, 2001). This has implications for the administration of this work, particularly with regard to the resources required to interpret and implement these changes.

"The national framework... sets out what each subject should be teaching, and it does get changed periodically, like they've just had a whole new national curriculum for years 7, 8 and 9 and then they're about to change it again for the GCSE years... and there's so much change... I mean they want to get rid of levels now, but they haven't said what they want to replace them with – are we going back to A, B, C or are we measuring them in apples or... what are we doing? Sometimes it just feels like change for the sake of change, and there's no real reason behind it. Or we're going to replace it with this, this is better... we don't really know why, but get on with it. And it does seem to be like constant change all the time... It's a political football, education... so every new government that comes in, everything else gets thrown out and their new way comes in, and it's trying to keep up with everything." [Teacher A]

"They keep changing the skills, so it seems like every two years our schemes of work need re-writing, so we can use the same books, but everything needs going over all the time, so it seems you constantly need to re-write, tweak, shift around... you do a scheme of work and you know very well that that's got a shelf-life of two years maximum. You write them and you know very well that someone's going to say before long that it's something else, because we keep getting people in to tell us these new strategies, and then the head will want these new strategies put in, first it was thinking skills, then critical thinking skills, then literacy, all of these things." [Teacher G]

Solicitors describe themselves as finding legal solutions to practical problems. They usually specialise in a particular field where they regularly deal with similar kinds of problems and they do not regularly create the legal products, strategies or protections they offer from scratch. However, as with news and education, legislation is not fixed in its definition or implementation, laws are contested, and the provision of legal advice is an act of interpreting (and sometimes challenging) them.

"Much of what we do is a grey area, because you have our opinion of stuff, and you have the Revenue's opinion of stuff, and they don't always match, but without going to court you don't know who's right...it's all an element of interpretation. It's very rare that you're certain... [The

Revenue] publish a lot of guidance, but it's rarely on the specific point that you're after. Their guidance is on the very, very straightforward, very, very clear points that we don't need guidance on because it's obvious that's the answer. All the stuff where it's questionable is the area that the Revenue aren't willing to give guidance on – precisely because it's questionable..." [Solicitor A]

"In Court of Protection work decisions taken on behalf of the client are usually the responsibility of solicitor – there is very little in the way of guidance by the court. They'll say 'you're the professional deputy and you make all the decisions - we're not going to help you, but if you make the wrong one then we'll sanction you!'" [Solicitor F]

"In family law there's just not a lot written down in stone, so the court has statutory factors that they look at when deciding family disputes, but the way those factors are interpreted is completely discretionary and we always say to clients 'you get ten different judges, they'll give you ten different answers.'" [Solicitor D]

Similarly, while existing legal documents generated by previous cases provide a template for the advice, the guidance they provide is more akin to an aide-memoire or checklist reminding participants of the points they need to consider, the options available to them or a way of phrasing a particular clause, than it is a formula for the advice itself (Gawande, 2011). The client-led nature of the work means that in all but the most rudimentary cases every problem and the associated advice is, in its own way, unique because it is dependent upon the priorities, understanding, expectations and personality of the client.

"A good department is based on the precedents that they build up... and one of the main documents we do is very heavily pre-populated operational document which covers every single possible consequence for what happens going forward [but] it's not a case of just literally crossing stuff out, you have to think carefully about each option, but it should have all the options there effectively... and each paragraph, each clause, has various different clauses you can either take out or put in... so it has hundreds and hundreds of footnotes that you have to look at when you're filling it in. So it still ends up being bespoke... So I'm constantly working with comparisons... looking at all the changes... because you're constantly interpreting the document... it's like a negotiation, basically... you're negotiating with your own [client]." [Solicitor C]

Concepts of news, justice and education, as well as associated concepts such as best educational, journalistic and legal practice, are contested and consequently subject both to variation within any given circumstance, and to change over time. There is no correct or definitive answer to the questions that need to be answered in order for tasks to progress (What should be reported? How should it be reported? What should be taught? How should it be taught? What should be advised? How

should it be advised?). The “essentially contested” (Gallie, 1955-56) nature of the concepts upon which their work is based is directly relevant to the performance of participants’ work because it informs both the fluidity of context in which they operate (in that the precepts underpinning certain aspects of their work, such as legislation, the curriculum or the value attached to different kinds of news events, are subject to change), and variation in conceptions of the purpose of their role (both participants’ own, and those of others e.g. employers, consumers, the media, the public, politicians). Their contested nature also means that different interpretations can be (and are) used aggressively and/or defensively in defence of a particular position (Gallie, 1955-56).

There are occupational differences in the degree to which participants themselves participate in contesting these premises in that journalists are more actively engaged in the substantive debate as to what counts as news in their day-to-day work, while teachers and solicitors are subject to current government policy on the legislation and policies with which they are expected to comply. Yet when these change (which they regularly do) participants are required to (re)-interpret their task and organisational objectives as they apply to this new context. There is no one way of ‘finding out’ what the answer is; participants use the information that is available about the objectives, expected outcome and circumstances of their tasks to consider what the most appropriate course of action might reasonably be. These decisions are complex (in that they are informed by multiple factors) and strategic (in that they determine as well as achieve an outcome). The subjective nature of these decisions also makes it difficult for anyone (participants or their managers, employers and colleagues) to feel confident in their choices. The implications of this conceptual uncertainty, and the variation and conflict it generates, are discussed in more detail in the next section (and again in the following chapter).

The uncertain and unpredictable nature of their work has implications for the way participants’ performance is directed and managed by their employer (discussed in more detail in the next chapter). In her analysis of scientists working in a research lab Bailyn (1985: 134) draws a distinction between “strategic autonomy - the freedom to set one’s own research agenda - and operational autonomy - the freedom, once a problem has been set, to attack it by means determined by oneself, within the given organisational resource constraints”. Conceptualisations of autonomy that fail to distinguish between the two (as Evetts (2002) argues is often the case in analyses of the ‘professions’), conflate two different aspects of work and

employment: autonomy, or “immunity from regulation and evaluation by others” and discretion, or the freedom to decide what should be done in a particular situation (Evetts, 2002: 341). Where professional autonomy assigns the responsibility and authority of devising the criteria (and objectives) against which work should be assessed to the people performing the work (i.e. the professionals) rather than to a third party such as their employer or consumer, discretion requires workers “to make decisions and recommendations that take all factors and requirements into account...” regardless of who created and controls the organisational, economic, social and bureaucratic conditions under which they must work (Freidson, 2001; Evetts, 2002: 345). As employees (whether staff or freelance) participants in all three occupations are obliged to achieve the objectives specified by their employer. The criteria used to assess their work are also, for the most part, determined by third parties (discussed in chapter five). However, they have a large amount of discretion over the means by and manner in which these objectives are achieved, and, as with all responsibilities, this discretion can be both a blessing and a curse (Evans and Harris, 2004). In this case, responsibility for realising rather than simply executing their work objectives means that participants must devise the means by which their imprecisely specified aims might be transformed into concrete outcomes. The next section considers how participants’ own understanding of their role and the purpose of their work informs this realisation of their work objectives

The ‘ideal’ journalist, teacher and solicitor

Many participants draw a distinction between the ‘ideal’ journalist, teacher or solicitor and their own practice, but their descriptions of these ‘ideal’ workers, and of their own values and motivations, vary considerably both within and across each occupation.

Journalists

The purpose of a journalist is variously described as anything from disseminating news items to creating news stories, from being an objective conduit of news to playing an active role in setting the news agenda, from describing news incidents to interpreting news events, and from breaking new stories to validating new information (Deuze, 2005; Hanitzsch, 2011). The value attached to these different

roles can vary between fields (e.g. Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen 2007; Tambini, 2010) as well as one medium and another (Cassidy, 2005).

One of the most striking features of the narratives of the journalists in this study is their differing interpretation of broadly similar ideals and motivations. The academic literature on journalism differentiates between three or four categories of journalist: the disseminator (who aims to distribute reliable, objective information), the interpreter (who is more analytical), the activist or adversary (who is more critical – sometimes described as the ‘watchdog’ of democracy), and the ‘populist mobiliser’ (who is more concerned with publicising individual experience of everyday life) (Pihl-Thingvad, 2015). At first glance, participants’ accounts seem to suggest that they are broadly in alignment with one or other of these categories, but further clarification of their views reveals a much less clear delineation between the different positions. Yet there remains a difference between their individual interpretations of the purpose of a journalist, and this informs their conception of ‘good’ journalistic practice.

“I think news reporting [is about] that fast turnaround... I think it’s almost solely informative; people want to know why their council tax bill is going up 4%, whereas what I do is probably more like ‘find out what they’re not telling you’ – council tax bills have gone up 4% because they’ve spent £500 million in consultancy fees when they could have recruited staff for £150 million... One of my colleagues used to refer to me as ‘the most hated man [in the region]’ because I don’t worry too much about upsetting people... I think you have to be quite hard-edged, quite thick-skinned... [Have] what I’ve heard Nick Davies describe as a kind of rat-like cunning... you have to have an investigative and inquiring mind, and an innate cynicism not to believe everything you’re told.” [Journalist G]

“People have different views on it. My view is I am partly there as a buffer to make sure things don’t get slipped under the net... but I also largely believe that most of the time people are doing things for the right reasons, so it’s about informing people... For me it’s about bringing to light all the things that are going to have an impact on our listeners, whether that’s good or bad, I see it more like an information conduit, but I know there are other journalists who see it more as ‘I am the last bastion of truth’... I’m there to expose wrong-doing, but I would say for 90% of my job there’s not much wrong doing to expose, so it’s just about making sure things don’t get swept under the carpet... I think that’s what my role is, to shine a light on things to make sure they get better... I’m a news girl, I like the churn.” [Journalist E]

“I want to make the world a better place, I know that sounds very cheesy but I’m very passionate about education and I feel like everybody should be well-educated and well-informed about what’s going on around them.” [Journalist H]

"I think the type of person you are will inform the type of journalism you do... I love allowing people to go to places they wouldn't be able to go because I've been and I can tell them about it... A lot of people can be 'unless it involves my life I'm not interested' and I think I have ended up being that bridge person...I'm going to write in a way that you will listen to because I'm not going to yell at you and I'm actually going to make it relevant... I'm like the everyman character in fiction." [Journalist D]

"I came into journalism because I like writing... and I almost don't want to tell anyone because I do feel in that respect that I'm a bit of a flawed journalist... I like to write comment pieces because you always get a reaction 'oh, no one has said this before, it's absolutely right'... It was just nice to think someone had read what I'd written and thought 'yes, this is something we should be discussing'... I guess that's another role of journalism isn't it? Highlighting stuff that might have gone under the radar otherwise, making people look at it in a different way." [Journalist I]

"I think the purpose of a journalist and my own aims are probably slightly different, in that I'm not necessarily aiming to be the best, the ideal journalist. I suppose if you're being idealistic... the purpose of a journalist is to... make people aware of how the world works, a more lofty way of putting that would be to tell people the truth of what's going on in the world, and ultimately perhaps change things. But I think the number of journalists that actually effect change is actually quite small... [Also] there's no point being a great journalist if the way you put it across is so dull that nobody can be bothered to read or watch it." [Journalist B]

"Have you seen House of Cards? There's a journalist called Zoe Barnes and I think she is what journalism is all about... she's tenacious, driven, motivated, accurate...um, not always ethical, but we'll forget that... I think she's a very good investigative journalist and that's something I respect a lot. There are other types of journalists, like feature writers and bloggers, who are more opinionated and probably more witty in the way they use their language, but that doesn't excite me as much as investigative journalism." [Journalist J]

As well as distinguishing between their own aims and those of their organisation, participants also differentiate between their own aims and those of other journalists. One significant variation is participants' interpretation of the role journalists should play in effecting change. Nearly all participants described themselves as bringing about some kind of change through their work, but their precise interpretation of the nature and outcome of this change differs according to their individual understanding of the purpose of their work. For some, this change is primarily about perspective or the way audiences view or think about issues. These participants aim to raise awareness of other people's lives or to educate audiences about environmental issues or government policy. For others, it is about effecting material change by holding those in power to account, bringing rogues to justice or campaigning for a particular outcome. Participants holding similar goals can also

differ in their views as to the best means of achieving them, for some it is through raising questions or arguing a particular case in an opinion piece, others prefer investigative features or the regular interpretation of events through daily news reporting. While sharing broadly similar features in their conception of the journalists' role, participants' personal occupational values vary considerably in their interpretation as to the purpose of their work and features of journalistic practice they consider most valuable and rewarding.

Teachers

Although there is a great deal of political and academic interest in, and comment on, teachers' professional values and character and the impact of this on their teaching, there is surprisingly little empirical data on secondary school teachers' individual occupational priorities and beliefs (Carr, 2006; 2007; Sunley and Locke, 2010). However, research on associated topics indicates that teachers' conceptions of their work are informed by their personal views on the educative and instrumental purposes of schooling, as well as the environments in which they teach (e.g. the type of school) (Comber and Nixon, 2009; Priestley et al, 2012; Maguire et al, 2015). As for journalists, there is a sense that teachers in a democratic society have a civic duty to prepare pupils for their future participation in society (Wilkinson, 2007). In secondary education, many teachers also identify with their discipline as well as their occupation, seeing themselves as scientists or historians as well as teachers (Ball and Goodson, 1985).

When asked about the nature of their role and the purpose of their work, most teachers cited achieving good exam results as one of their primary goals, not only because it was a priority of their school, but also because it was in the best interest of their pupils. Participants' understanding of their pupils was central to their conception of their role, and to their motivation and ambitions for their work. In part, this varied according to the nature of their school, with teachers at high achieving or independent schools (or where parents played a more active role in their child's education) prioritising the cultural and civic role of education, while those teaching at schools in more disadvantaged areas (or whose pupils had less parental support) cited the role education could play in improving life chances and facilitating access to a broader range of opportunities. However, within and across these two categories participants' descriptions of their aims with regard to these outcomes often overlapped, with teachers teaching the same subject in different environments

holding similar views on the role their subject could play in opening pupils' eyes to issues or experiences (e.g. to the experiences of people who were different to them, or to societal or environmental issues that affect everyone). Equally, participants teaching across the same kinds of school could take very different positions on the relationship between education and future prospects, depending on the relative value they attached to inspiring ambition and raising aspirations versus mediating expectations and offering more practical forms of help.

"I'm under no illusions that I'm some sort of Pied Piper leading them on some sort of journey towards a love of history; like leading a horse to water, you can't make them drink. What I'm hoping to do is to expose them to some events that happened in the past, make them think about them, think about any links to today, anything that puzzles them or is strange about them... I think I'm quite unusual in that I'm passionate about moving teaching and learning on beyond the exam, beyond the National Curriculum, beyond what is expected... maybe not unusual, but a certain type of teacher... were you to speak to another one... who actually wants to change their lives and is much more interested in the pastoral side I think you would get very different answers." [Teacher H]

"To enrich lives... because sometimes the praise I give will be the only praise they get. And... to be their guide, because they might not have any other guidance... It all comes down to the passion, to wanting to impart knowledge and wanting someone else to feel the same way I feel when I pick up a book, or pick up a pen, and to hope someone else's grey day could be made brighter... to know they've always got an escape route through reading." [Teacher G]

"The role of a teacher is to give opportunity. Education is absolutely essential. They're not going to be able to move away from here without a decent education... I think it's really important to give these kids the idea that there is something else, because they live in a very closed world [Most of them never leave the local area] so they don't know about anything else, they don't meet people who aren't like them... I think there's a real joy in learning about another... it's a way into a whole new world... I also want them to know that they can be as good as [anyone else]." [Teacher I]

"I think inspiring students to look at the world around them... giving them a broad overview of the world, and a better appreciation of things, and how cultures and the environment interact so they're not blind to things like development issues etc." [Teacher J]

"You're there to keep them on track and to mediate their [interaction with knowledge]... otherwise they just grasp things and get the wrong end of the stick... My thing, going back to scientific literacy, is to bring in the things that they wouldn't necessarily think about. So Year 9 are doing about energy and I'm saying '[by next year] we won't produce enough energy in this country to meet our energy needs', and you hear jaws dropping, 'yeah that's a problem kids, we've got to think about it'." [Teacher B]

“It’s important to have an awareness of the social and economic context they’re entering when they leave education. There aren’t many well-paid jobs for young people, there’s a diminishing rate of return for going to university... and I think it’s important to be honest with young people about that, say ‘yes, you can succeed, but it’s very difficult, if you want to do this, then you’re going to have to do x, y, z to achieve that’... being able to guide them based on the awareness that it’s a tough old world out there and there are certain kinds of pathways that will make more sense than others.” [Teacher C]

Participants’ conceptions of their role as a teacher varied according to their own personal understanding of education and schooling, as well as by subject and/or their school environment. Perhaps most interesting was the consensus amongst all participants that their role was to broaden pupils’ horizons (whether in terms of ideas, issues or opportunities) rather than to inculcate any one particular set of attributes or qualities. Some prioritised the civic role schooling can play in engaging pupils in contemporary issues, others were more concerned with social justice and the role education (and good exam results) could play in providing pupils with a passport to better career and life opportunities in the future, or with equipping pupils with the practical tools that will help them to navigate adult life (whether in work, or as citizens or consumers). Most teachers’ conceptions included all of these features to some degree, but differed in the value they attached to them, and in their views on how best to achieve these outcomes. One point of contention, for example, was the degree to which curriculum material should be made more or less accessible to those students who struggled to engage with it due to their unfamiliarity with the subject matter (e.g. they rarely read for pleasure at home; are unfamiliar with the theatre). Where some teachers believed the best way to engage these students was through re-interpreting the material in a way that would make the ideas more accessible (e.g. discussing them with reference to popular culture), others were vehemently opposed to what they described as the ‘dumbing down’ of topics and ideas, which they believed disadvantaged students further in the long run. Consequently, the way participants reconciled the instrumental (e.g. exam results) and educative and/or social purposes of their role depended on their conception of these outcomes, their priorities for their pupils, and their understanding of the role they, as teachers, might and/or could play in facilitating these outcomes for these children. These personal occupational values both informed and were informed by the types of pupils they currently (or had previously) taught, and the type and ethos of the schools in which they chose (or had previously chosen) to work.

Solicitors

Legal work has long been associated with public service. This orientation has traditionally been understood to mean making a contribution to society (Holmes et al, 2012), but the rigidity of this interpretation is not always an accurate representation of solicitors' own motivation (Boon, 2005). As with teachers and journalists, roles can be perceived differently by solicitors in different fields (Westaby, 2010; Melville and Laing, 2007), and interpreted differently by solicitors working in the same field (Sandberg and Pinnington, 2009). A common theme across all solicitors' descriptions of their role was their orientation towards a client-centred understanding of their work. This was demonstrated partly through concern for the client as a customer (i.e. meeting their specific needs), and partly through a perception of their duty to enable access to legal solutions or justice through participation in the legal system, which could be considered an alternative interpretation of the public service role (Boon, 2005).

"I suppose it's essentially a guidance role. It's about guiding them as to what to protect and how to protect it in order to maximise the value of their business... and also guidance as to their conduct in relation to third parties... the decision of whatever you do has to be down to them, but I think you are there to lead them in the right direction." [Solicitor G]

"I mean the glib answer is to be an adviser, but then you've got to break that down – what is that? They've got to come away knowing more than when they first met you, that's the way I've always seen the role... it's about educating the client, not just what would be the best decision but why... I mean you're a service in a way, and people use a service to obtain an outcome [so] you've got to ascertain quite quickly what the client is after, what is their ideal outcome... but it's not only advising on the law, but within that trying to say 'this is a realistic outcome' - I call it hosing down expectations. Because whilst the client drives you, you've also got to drive the client as to what the parameters are, otherwise what's the point of having you? They can go into court and ask for the [plaintiff] to be smashed or whatever, but they're going to be just as successful as if you did that, which is not very." [Solicitor B]

Most participants described their work as providing legal solutions to their client's problems, whether by solving an existing problem, or by preventing problems from arising in future. Participants commonly held pragmatism as being central to protecting their clients' interests. Some viewed this as a guidance role (i.e. explaining options and advising on outcomes), while others described it as educating clients as to the law and its opportunities and limitations (i.e. explaining why certain outcomes are more or less likely), or acting as a confidant to clients who

wished to engage in a more wide-ranging discussion about the broader issues surrounding their problem. Participants' interpretation of the boundaries of their advisory responsibilities depended in part on the nature of their particular role (e.g. those engaged in facilitating transactions or advising vulnerable clients described their advisory role in broader terms than those whose roles were necessarily more focused on technical details, whether due to exigencies of time or the nature of the work e.g. tax). However, their position was also informed by their own conception of the purpose, priorities and demands of their work, with some describing themselves as 'part-counsellor, part-solicitor', or 'part business advisor, part-solicitor', while others sought to limit their participation in matters that did not, in their view, directly arise from or pertain to the legal question on which they had been asked to advise. A number of participants attributed their reluctance or willingness to engage with certain kinds of legal work to their character and the kinds of issues they felt more comfortable dealing with (e.g. preferring to work with businesses rather than individuals).

"When people say 'Oh I want to be a lawyer' I don't think they realise that there are such extremes within it. Litigation is completely different from private client or corporate for instance... With corporate you're dealing with businesses, it's not personal to them. It's not that they don't care, but they are more removed from the situation. Whereas everything I deal with now on a day-to-day basis has got some kind of personal, emotional involvement... People tend to do things more out of principle, the things that people argue about in estates aren't the valuable things, they're the little bits and bobs that remind them of the person, that have sentimental value - and they'll spend a fortune arguing over them."
[Solicitor H]

"With some of my clients 10% of my conversation is legal advice, 40% is practical advice and the rest of it is therapy. You do find yourself having conversations where you put the phone down and think you didn't advise them; it's talking them down from doing something completely stupid that is going to ruin their case... I like what we stand for here and I like legal aid work. I wouldn't advise anyone else to go into it but I think I'm a glutton for punishment. I like helping people, it sounds clichéd but I did get into this job to help people... We don't achieve everything we want all the time... but I still see that as a positive in that if someone has got advice and knows they can't take action they don't continue with the belief that they could." [Solicitor I]

"I have to develop a good working relationship with clients and it's responding to them and dealing with their concerns cost effectively, making sure they don't think that I'm ignoring what they say if it's not relevant, those kind of emotional needs. So for example at court [a client] got really upset about something and had a bit of a cry in the toilets, so it's supporting them without being a friend. We're not counsellors, we recommend that most of our clients go to see

counsellors, but we're not cost effective to do that sort of work, we're not trained to do that sort of work. So it's saying 'I appreciate how you feel, but this is the law, this is what I'm focusing on, and, I understand it's really frustrating that X has happened, but...' We don't tend to deal with exploring with them why they feel upset, because it's not our role to and we have to keep that boundary because it's just a waste of their money to call us to complain about stuff." [Solicitor D]

As with journalists and teachers, different solicitors were enthused by different aspects of their work, for some it was the intellectual problem-solving, for others it was creating 'real-life' solutions; some were fascinated by their clients' individual stories (whether business or personal); others relished participating in a particular field or industry (e.g. financial services, retail). The striking thing about these categories of motivation is that they did not fall neatly into any one field of work. Solicitors whose interest was engaged through their clients' personal stories could also enjoy detailed technical work (e.g. one solicitor practising family law enjoyed the combination of hearing clients' individual stories and the complex technical work associated with the division of assets). Some solicitors dealing with corporate transactions enjoyed the business of putting the deal together, while others preferred the process of analysing its tax implications. They all described their work as a kind of intellectual pursuit, but varied in their explanation of the process, with some describing it as creative (i.e. constructing a solution), while others recounted it as being more like solving a puzzle (i.e. avoiding the traps; identifying the best course of action). As with teachers, solicitors' personal occupational values both informed and were informed by the types of clients they worked with (e.g. legally aided or privately funded; more or less vulnerable or comfortable with the law and legal institutions), and the field in which they chose to work (e.g. private client or commercial).

There is no 'one' ideal journalist, teacher or solicitor; each participant has their own interpretation of the purpose of their role and best way to achieve their preferred outcomes. These personal occupational values and priorities are mediated (but not determined) by the people with whom they engage and the environments in which they practice. Despite this variation, most draw a distinction between the role as they understand it in theory, and the way they operate in practice, and recognise the role their employer plays in mediating their personal ambitions and objectives through the specification of organisational objectives that prioritise a different set of outcomes.

Between the specification and enactment of objectives

Discretion, like the hole in a doughnut, does not exist except as an area left open by a surrounding belt of restriction.

R. Dworkin, 1977: 31

In one way, the discrepancy between participants' ideals regarding the purpose and practice of their work and the organisational objectives of their employer prevents them from being able to achieve their personal goals. A number of studies take this view when examining the impact this rift has on career satisfaction or organisational commitment (Mellado and Dalen, 2014; Skovsgaard, 2014; Pihl-Thingvad, 2015). These authors rightly point out that it would be a mistake to equate role conception with role enactment (Tandoc et al, 2013). However, viewing organisational aims and individual objectives as being primarily at odds to one another presents the conflict between the two as a dual in which one (usually assumed to be the organisation) ultimately erodes or overrides the influence of the other. This simplification of the two competing interests assists in the identification of, and differentiation between, the values and objectives of the different parties, but also misrepresents the tension as it is experienced by participants, many of whom actively engaged with a version of this conflict when articulating their own position.

"I used to think [the purpose of a solicitor] was to help people...now I think, I mean obviously it's to sort out people's problems and advise them on what they should and shouldn't do in various situations... but when you look at it from the firm's perspective, the purpose of a solicitor to the firm is to bill as much as they can... Whereas when you look at it from an outsider's perspective, all they want you to do is what they've asked you to do, to do it on time, and to give them a definite answer, yes or no, the pros and cons, advice as to what they should do. I don't know what my thinking is on it... it's various things to different people."
[Solicitor J]

"I think right now the purpose of a teacher is to deliver results as specified by government. Should the purpose of a teacher be that? I don't know. I think at some level yes, obviously, you know, young people need to learn things and they need to come out of education with a stock of knowledge and a stock of skills that they can then use in the future [but] I think, for me to do my job properly, I think beyond just making sure they're getting good grades, I need to be leaving them with a sense or an understanding of some of the important elements of our culture and how it has evolved." [Teacher C]

Participants in all three occupations drew attention to the disparity between their own 'ideal' of a journalist, teacher or solicitor and that of their employer when describing their practice, but they also drew attention to a gap between the specification and enactment of organisational objectives. The difference between personal and organisational objectives creates conflict, but the gap between the specification and enactment of these objectives also creates space in which participants can (and must) resolve these tensions in order to identify a means of executing their tasks. The interpretative and creative work required to realise their employers' objectives means that participants' own understanding of their work necessarily plays a role in shaping the manner in which they fulfil these organisational aims.

Although clear that their primary role is to achieve the objectives set out by their employer, there is a sense amongst participants in all three occupations that it is sometimes possible to fulfil these criteria and also achieve (some) of their own personal ambitions through a judicious combination of the two. While it does not follow that it is always feasible for participants to achieve their own objectives in pursuing those of their employer, their comments as to the possibility of merging the two are illustrative of the interpretative and strategic work required in identifying a means of accomplishing the outcome they are expected to deliver. Similarly, participants' personal objectives do not always conflict with those of their employer; in some cases they both aspire to similar outcomes, even if not necessarily for the same reasons (e.g. achieving good exam results is in the interests of both the school and their pupils' future; creating interesting news stories will both increase the size of the audience and engage individuals in the information or message; providing high quality legal advice and support can enhance the reputation of the firm, as well as achieving a satisfactory outcome and experience for the client).

"Exam boards, at GCSE and A' level, they're very into rewarding alternative interpretations, so how you can interpret character in different ways and so on... although on the one hand exam board criteria can be restrictive, I also think if you're an intelligent teacher there's plenty of opportunity to teach in the way you want to, as long as [your pupils] understand what they have to do in the exam." [Teacher F]

"A lot of stories you can't simplify adequately in 40 seconds, but you've just got to try... just because you've only got 40 seconds doesn't mean you can't put across a great story very quickly... There's no reason why the journalism I do can't be investigative... actually think 'well what's the consequence of this?' so you're actually saying something and making it more relevant to your listener." [Journalist A]

The nature of the employment relationship demands that participants deliver on the objectives determined by their employer, but the partial and imprecise specification of these objectives, and the uncertain and unpredictable nature and context of their work tasks, also requires that participants draw on their own interpretation of these outcomes to identify the means of achieving these objectives within the particular context in which they are operating.

A multitude of influences inform participants' understanding of their purpose and occupational values, including their work context (Solbrekke, 2008) and their personal values (Plaisance and Skewes, 2003), and interpretation of occupational and organisational objectives can vary within the same organisation as well as the same field (Larsson et al, 2003; Priestley et al, 2012). An employee's perception of their role is sometimes understood as being indicative of the sophistication of their comprehension of their work on the grounds that there are more or less sophisticated ways of understanding particular tasks (e.g. Sandberg and Pinnington (2009) on the conception of managing risk in legal work). The variation described here, on the other hand, is to do with participants' personal interpretation of occupational and organisational objectives that are intrinsically ambiguous, both in their character and in their specification; here no one conception can easily be described as being more or less sophisticated than another, rather they are different because they prioritise different things.

Although there is some consensus as to the general precepts guiding their practice, participants differ in their understanding of the 'ideal' journalist, teacher or solicitor. There is also considerable variation in the interpretation of occupational and organisational objectives between participants in the same occupation, and even those working in the same field and/or organisational environment (e.g. the same kind of school). Some participants hold similar positions, but attach different values to them. Some participants hold multiple, sometimes contradictory, positions at the same time, yet are able to reconcile these within their broader conception of the purpose and aims of their work. There is a discrepancy between their employers' objectives for participants' work and participants' own understanding of their role, but there are also points at which these overlap. Participants' conception of their work informs their interpretation of their employers' objectives, and their assessment of the nature and width of the gap between their own objectives and those of their employer. The gap between the specification and the enactment of organisational objectives creates possibilities for participants to achieve some or parts of their own

objectives while fulfilling their responsibilities to their employer. It is worth noting here that participants' own positions do not necessarily remain fixed and they can occupy different positions or value different aspects of their work differently depending on the particular circumstances in which they apply, although this flexibility is often in their interpretation as to the best means of achieving a particular outcome rather than a transformation of the substance of their objectives or position on a particular issue. This flexibility, and the role personal occupational values play in shaping participants' relationships with colleagues, is explored further in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has identified a number of features of work that are common to all three occupations, namely: the unpredictable conditions and uncertain premise of their tasks, the imprecise and incomplete specification of task objectives, and the variable nature of the work process. Much of the decision-making required to execute tasks is interpretative and has to be performed 'on the job', which precludes the determination of these outcomes in advance (e.g. by a third party uninvolved in the performance of the work). The execution of participants' tasks is dependent on a combination of unpredictable factors (e.g. events, people) that generate a range of choices for which there is no one fixed or foreseeable answer, which means the end product of the work is inextricably linked to the decisions taken during the course of its production (e.g. reporting the news, teaching a lesson, giving legal advice). The unpredictable and variable nature of their tasks means there is uncertainty around the means by which organisational objectives can be achieved. The interpretative space between their employers' organisational objectives and the means and outcome of their work means that participants' own understanding, values, and ambitions play a role in shaping their interpretation of this guidance, but their interpretative freedom is also limited by the circumstances in which they are making these decisions. Consequently the discretion participants have over the performance of their work is more precisely described as operational discretion in the interpretation and realisation of their work objectives (Bailyn, 1985; Evetts, 2002; Campbell and Charlesworth, 2012), rather than professional or strategic autonomy over the conditions and governance of their work practice (i.e. the criteria by which their performance is assessed) (Freidson, 2001). Having established the nature of their work tasks, the next chapter examines the organisational and social conditions

in which participants perform their work, and explores how these both clarify and complicate their practice.

Chapter 5

The conditions, obligations and performance of participants' work

This chapter discusses the conditions in which journalists, teachers and solicitors perform their work. The first section describes the means by which participants' performance is monitored and assessed, examining how their work is evaluated and by whom. The second section explores the managerial and collegiate relationships that inform participants' working practices, examining how these enable and constrain participants in their work. The chapter concludes by assessing how these mechanisms and relationships shape the conditions and obligations of their work, and the implications of these for individual workers.

Doing a 'good' job

This section examines the ways in which participants, their employers and the consumers of their products and services evaluate their work. It describes the mechanisms through which participants' work performance, output and productivity are monitored and measured, and explores how, and to what extent, these regulate participants' performance and work practices.

Quantitative indicators

One way in which participants' performance is evaluated is through the analysis of quantitative indicators that serve as proxy measures of productivity. "At very best, surrogates for the real objectives", performance indicators simplify organisational objectives to create easily assessed measures of success (O'Neill, 2002: 55). For solicitors, the most common method of performance assessment is the recording of the number of 'billable hours' they accrue (i.e. the number of working hours for which they can charge their client a fee). Nearly all solicitors (regardless as to whether their clients were funded by private means or legal aid) had an individual target specifying the number of billable hours they were expected to accrue and/or the amount of revenue they were expected to generate for their firm. Teachers' performance is similarly assessed through their pupils' achievements in exams, with teachers across all schools and subjects (fee-paying, academy, comprehensive,

grammar) describing exam results as central to evaluation of their (and their school's) performance. Journalists, on the other hand, do not have the same kinds of targets; their individual performance is not assessed against these kinds of quantitative measures of achievement. However, their work is increasingly coming under a similar kind of scrutiny as news organisations start to make more use of the software that enables them to monitor how audiences engage with their material online (e.g. generating quantitative data on the number of 'views' an item has received, the length of time visitors stay on a particular page, and engagement with their news items on social media).

These indicators are central to their employers' assessment of participants' work and to the distribution of rewards, both formal (e.g. bonuses, pay rises, promotions) and informal (e.g. getting your article onto the front page of the website). In private practice law firms, for example, solicitors' quarterly and annual bonuses are directly related to the amount of money they generate for the firm, and the revenue they generate is also taken into account when they are considered for promotion. The relationship between performance and financial reward is less direct for solicitors working in not-for-profit organisations, but even these participants are acutely aware of the relationship between their own performance and the financial health of their organisation, and take this into account in their own assessment as to their value as an employee.

"We get paid a salary, we have to be able to cover our costs and people say 'I haven't had a pay rise', well you haven't brought in your target... I remember when I was made permanent my other half said 'why aren't you asking for a pay rise?' - because I can't justify a pay rise because I didn't bring in my target. You can only start arguing for a pay rise if you a) get more responsibility because that's understandable, or b) you are doing the same role but bringing in more money – otherwise how can you justify it?" [Solicitor I]

These quantitative indicators measure participants' output, but the manner in which they are monitored is associated with a drive to deliver 'more' or 'better' results (e.g. bill more hours, achieve better grades, attract a larger audience). Freidson (2001) argues that one of the most important differences between productivity and efficiency is that productivity is a substantive measure of performance because it is concerned with the cost associated with achieving a particular output (whether a particular volume or quality of work), while efficiency is instrumental, seeking the most economical means of achieving organisational goals while leaving the output

itself unspecified. Participants' descriptions of the performance indicators outlined above suggest that although they are assigned a particular target, these targets are in fact open-ended, compelling participants to constantly 'improve' rather than simply to achieve a particular level of performance. Ostensibly used to measure participants' productivity, the use to which these figures are then put (e.g. to allocate rewards, to determine an employee's 'value' to the organisation) means that they create a working environment in which whatever participants achieve is never quite enough.

The other key feature of these kinds of quantitative indicators is that they treat the outcome and the performance of participants' work as one and the same thing. In their analysis of billable hours Campbell and Charlesworth (2012: 102) observe, "under time recording and time billing, both the revenue of the firm and the labour of the individual were measured in the same way, rendering this labour and its contribution to the firm transparent". For employers, these measures of performance (e.g. billable hours, exam results, the number of 'hits' on webpage) create a direct link between an employee (and the costs associated with maintaining this resource) and their contribution to the employer's financial and/or organisational success (e.g. profits, service provision). This enables employers to bypass the practical problems associated with delivering their product or service, including problems associated with any uncertainty or unpredictability of work tasks, passing the responsibility for resolving these difficulties on to the employees themselves (Campbell and Charlesworth, 2012).

Participants differ in their attitudes towards these indicators. Some associate this mechanism of assessment with freedom, because employing these measures means that their employer usually allows anyone whose performance is satisfactory to perform their work however they choose. This is consistent with research conducted by Perryman et al (2011) who found that school leaders were content to allow departments to manage themselves as long as their pupils were performing well in exams, intervening only when performance declined.

"I think I'm very lucky in that my employer is very hands-off... as long as I'm considered to be doing a good job by the various metrics, they don't care what I do." [Teacher C]

"I'm really lucky [it's] probably 60:40 maybe even 70:30 in my favour of deciding [what stories to report on]... We've kind of agreed that if I keep

coming up with the goods then they'll just keep allowing me to do so."
[Journalist G]

However, the same participants, particularly teachers and journalists, simultaneously question the validity of these measures as reliable indicators of the outcomes they are supposed to measure (e.g. exam results as a measure of educational success; number of 'hits' as a measure of audience engagement or the quality of a news item), and the impact this then has on their performance, particularly the way it limits their options when making decisions about how to execute their tasks.

"I think what, in terms of what's constraining me in my job, it's results, you know, it's the pressure of results, so obviously that's not a bad thing, but I think it's because of that, rather than any direct management pressure; that is what is making me do certain things and not do certain things." [Teacher C]

"We have [monitoring software] in our office which reflects the number of people that are on any given page on the website at one time, and sometimes if you do a great investigative piece, or one of my colleagues does a solid court story or whatever, and you see that that's got 300 people looking at it, but there's a funny video of a rugby clown falling in a puddle that's got like 800,000 people looking at it, you just want to cry... So much of the audience online is so young and so transient, how can you drive people to [those more serious stories]? So we're thinking more about what we can do with things like video, you know... because the more people that click on the page on the website, the more money [the organisation will] make." [Journalist G]

For other participants (particularly those solicitors and teachers who are assigned a specific target) these mechanisms are both a burden and an incentive, in that they require employees to shoulder responsibility for delivering on the variables for which there is no one reliable route to success (e.g. profit, exam results, page views), but also provide them with the means to measure their own success, monitor their improvement, and manage (or increase) their rewards.

"You are going into a target-driven job... if you don't cover your costs and bring in a profit to your firm you're not going to be kept on." [Solicitor I]

"I think there's also that competitive edge... you want to be top, or as near to the top as you can get... we look at the rankings of the entire company when they're published, and you see where you come, if it's somewhere higher up you think 'Yes! I'm billing lots'. I think that's completely natural that kind of excitement, it's just childish excitement."
[Solicitor G]

In this measure of performance (i.e. as the contribution made to an organisation's 'bottom line' in terms of revenue, exam results or audience, rather than the execution of tasks under certain conditions) no account is taken of the circumstances in which participants are operating.

Peer review

The content of participants' work is monitored through a variety of peer review processes. These range from formal 'audits' conducted by external regulators to more informal internal peer review practices. Where quantitative indicators are treated (by employers at least) as 'objective' measures of performance, peer review processes are more open to interpretation. Participants' descriptions of the process characterise it as an essentially subjective evaluation, but one in which one person's opinion can carry more weight than another, and where assessment is guided by a set of procedures which sometimes cause performance to be judged through the appraisal of a sequence of independent features observed and assessed in isolation rather than as one complete activity.

For teachers, peer reviews take the form of lesson observations and book scrutinies (a review of their pupils' written work and the teacher's marking practices). Inspectors from Ofsted and Estyn and the Independent Schools Inspectorate carry out independent observations on behalf of the regulator (occasionally supplemented by observations from representatives from the Local Education Authority when schools are subject to special measures), while senior leaders and line managers conduct observations for internal performance assessments¹⁸. Some participants are also observed by colleagues for training and development purposes. These review processes are governed by guidance issued by senior leaders or regulators, and these dictate the framework for the evaluation (e.g. for book scrutinies, categories for evaluation might include: the presentation of the work, the setting of targets etc.) and sometimes for feedback (e.g. the reviewer completes a pro-forma). However, the evaluation itself is ultimately subjective, in that it is down to the reviewer to determine whether a teacher has met the criteria (e.g. if their feedback is useful; if the guidance they give to pupils is clear). For participants, the criteria used to evaluate their performance are simultaneously rigid and open to interpretation, creating a certain amount of uncertainty and anxiety.

¹⁸ Ofsted: Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills; Estyn: Office for Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales.

"It depends on who it is, and it's that ridiculous really... because I think it's very much subjective isn't it, and that's my whole beef with the observation process, is that it depends who you have, and unless every single person has the same person watching them, then it's never going to really be a fair reflection, however much training they have. They gave us training so that we could all observe lessons and even after the training people in the room were giving the same lesson 1 and the same lesson 3, 1 being outstanding and 3 being just adequate... some people would be going 'Oh that was excellent' and others would go 'God, barely adequate'." [Teacher G]

"I think the quality of Ofsted inspectors is mixed. I really don't have a problem with there being a body that is going to come and look at what we do here and check on us - what we do is really important and of course it needs checking. What I do have a problem with is the quality of some of the inspectors; a lot of the inspectors are just not good enough. And I think that's where Ofsted fails really, I think there are some brilliant people in Ofsted, but my experience is that a lot of their inspectors are just not good enough, and I have no respect for them, and I think that's the problem. And I think also the criteria is getting narrower and narrower and then you just do things for the sake of Ofsted, 'how will it look for Ofsted?'." [Teacher I]

Solicitors' work is regularly audited (either by external regulators or by contemporaries in other firms) to ensure they are complying with the regulatory guidelines that govern the practice of giving advice (e.g. keeping clients informed, explaining costs) and maintaining their files correctly (e.g. showing evidence of and justifying their advice). Their legal practice and the content of their advice are also reviewed internally, both informally (e.g. by passing files to other colleagues in their team), and formally (e.g. internal checks conducted by senior managers to ensure advice is compliant). Work which fails to meet the required standards can be subject to sanctions, which means that for some participants compliance with these regulatory guidelines is the point at which managers take the most active interest in their work.

"There is a certain level of micro-management in terms of compliance to what the legal aid agency (LAA) expects the work to be, and how the files are to be maintained and evidenced. You're subject to certain peer-reviews in terms of file audits to see whether the advice you're giving is actually appropriate... The trouble is, if you get so many files that are non-compliant...they can extrapolate that percentage across the entire contract...if you fail so many files it triggers an extrapolation clause which means that instead of you just not receiving payment for those files, they're saying 'Well if that's 20%, it's 20% now across the entire contract' so then you start talking about hundreds of thousands of pounds, so the pressure is on there. There is a management structure dealing with that side of things, not so much the advice as the compliance with what the contract with the LAA says." [Solicitor B]

Journalists are not subject to the same kinds of formal review processes as teachers or solicitors; their work is reviewed much more informally, but in some ways also more regularly. The product of their work is made public (e.g. an article published in a newspaper; a bulletin broadcast on the radio), which means editors can review the content of their employees' work more easily than managers in schools or law firms. Participants working on longer items (e.g. feature articles; documentaries) also submit work for review and sub-editing before the item goes out, using this feedback to improve the piece.

“Ultimately, the editor (it’s in inverted commas) ‘commissions’ us to make a programme... but then he pretty much leaves us alone... and in some ways, because he’s not involved in the minutiae of it, and because he doesn’t know too much, he’s quite helpful, because he can just say what the listener would say, like ‘well I don’t understand what you’ve just said’ or ‘I don’t get that’, you know, ‘why are you ignoring the obvious?’ or ‘what I really want to know is...x, y and z’. So he’s kind of a useful barometer and doesn’t really get that involved. And he likes to be fairly un-involved until the first run through, so he likes to hear it almost for the first time as the listener would.” [Journalist B]

Despite similarities in the methods used to monitor the content of their work, the character and perceived purpose of these mechanisms differs within and across all three occupations, with participants describing their experiences of these peer review processes quite differently. Solicitors are subject to a greater number of more formal audits than journalists and teachers, but they tend to view these as a form of quality control, and see more informal monitoring mechanisms (e.g. reviewing documents for colleagues; sitting down with senior managers to review how far cases have progressed) as a means of keeping on top of workloads and managing the risks associated with making a mistake or giving inappropriate advice. Journalists are more inclined to describe their more informal peer review processes (e.g. reviewing their work with an editor) as a means of actively improving their work, seeing these systems (in general) as a means of improving the quality of their output, which reflects well on them as individual journalists as well as on the reputation of the organisation of which they are a part. Many teachers, on the other hand, view many peer review and performance management processes as evidence that their employer does not trust them to do their job properly. However, even here there is significant variation within the occupation, with some participants viewing inspections by external reviewers as a necessary evil but internal observations as an opportunity to acquire valuable feedback, while others see all observations as an opportunity for senior leaders to find fault with their performance.

This variation in teachers' attitudes towards peer review as a mechanism of performance management can, in part, be attributed to the ethos of senior leaders and the personality and disposition of managers and heads of department, which varies considerably within and across both organisations and occupations. This will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Satisfied customers

Data from employment surveys indicates that consumers are playing an increasingly important role in governing employees' work, with the number of respondents citing pressure from clients or customers as a determinant of their work effort rising from 37% in 1986 to 57% by 2001 (Green, 2006). The greater involvement of consumers in shaping the provision of goods and services has seen this group acquire additional authority as they have been embraced by employers and others (e.g. policymakers) as "de facto supervisors", shaping and evaluating employees' work practices as well as their work product (Fuller and Smith, 1991; Beynon et al, 2002: 268). These parties' interests, demands and feedback are central to participants' interpretation of their organisational and occupational objectives, and subsequently their priorities and work performance.

"If a client wants it today, you have to do it today." [Solicitor A]

[On evidence of good performance] *"If there are no calls from parents! That does sound quite flippant, but because we're a fee-paying school it's quite a good indicator."* [Teacher L]

"I wish I'd been a journalist before the Internet... because we're just always thinking 'how are we going to sell the paper?', 'how are we going to make people buy the paper?' rather than 'what should we be reporting on?'... Our website has become much more like [a tabloid]; it's much more about hits and getting clicks... [We're] constantly thinking 'what do readers want?'" [Journalist I]

For solicitors, particularly those in private firms, this means prioritising their clients' demands above all other obligations when organising their work. This is complicated by the fact that most participants are working on multiple cases at any one time, and this difficulty is exacerbated when the client themselves is particularly challenging (e.g. hostile or reluctant to take advice; defensive of their position; determined to pursue a path the solicitor would advise against; mistrusting of their solicitors' motivation or their professional competence; especially demanding of their time). In journalism, it means paying ever-greater attention to the demands of the audience.

The Internet has considerably disrupted the relationship between journalists and the consumers of their news stories. Where once audiences were treated as anonymous, relatively passive receivers of information, they are now encouraged to actively participate in, and give their opinions on, news coverage as it is published or broadcast, commenting on stories 'below the line' and contributing photographs and information to news reports (Witschge and Nygren, 2009; Williams et al, 2011). As news is increasingly sourced, reported and shared online, a more conversational model of journalism is replacing the traditional 'broadcast' model of news reporting, and journalists are using data on the popularity of news stories (e.g. the number of 'hits' an item has received) and feedback on the quality of news stories (e.g. audience comments on webpages, coverage on social media) to inform the selection and reporting of news stories (Pavlik, 2000; Welbers et al, 2015). These audiences play an increasingly important role in judging the accuracy and value of journalists' work as media outlets eagerly seek their feedback. In teaching it is the parents rather than pupils who play a particularly important role in mediating participants' employers' view of their performance, primarily through the impact parental complaints can have on their reputation. For one or two participants this authority has been extended to pupils, with school leaders inviting their classes to report on their teacher's performance by completing a questionnaire evaluating the quality of their teaching.

Participants' relationship with the consumers of their work is complicated by their legal and occupational responsibilities to the consumer, and their moral or contractual obligations to other parties, which may not allow them to comply with their consumers' wishes in the way that that party might expect or hope.

"We have really awkward clients as well, incredibly awkward business clients who actually question your knowledge... just because they want to push you, to test you probably, and that can be really difficult. And you have to just stand your ground because sometimes you can feel that clients are trying to push you into a corner so that they can achieve their objectives, whereas you know that that's not the right thing to do, that's a question of ethics." [Solicitor E]

Fulfilling their obligations to consumers is central to successful performance of their work, but the precise nature and degree of these obligations is often unclear, and interpreted differently by different groups (e.g. employers, regulators, the consumers themselves). Employers elicit feedback from consumers to inform their evaluation of participants' work, but their interpretation of what might be classed as 'good'

feedback is informed by their concerns as to participants' contribution to their organisational objectives. Consumers, on the other hand, are primarily concerned with their own individual outcomes (e.g. their experience of receiving legal advice, being taught, reading or watching a news item). These priorities are not necessarily always in opposition, but the variety of perspectives means that consensus cannot be taken for granted, contributing further uncertainty to the already unpredictable conditions in which participants are operating. Equally, consumers themselves are often much more diverse in their expectations and demands than their consignment to this category suggests. Not all consumers approach services in the same way, differing in their expectations and understanding of its purpose and practice, as well as their own role and entitlements as its consumer (Wilkins, 2010). Participants themselves made this observation when describing their experience of performing their work. Parents differ in their expectations of schools and teachers and of their own responsibilities. Different clients want different things from their solicitors, and react in different ways to the same situations (e.g. grief; litigation). Audiences (and individuals within audiences) will be more or less interested in different aspects of a story, and more or less entertained, engaged or irritated by different styles of presentation. In all three occupations consumers play a central role in evaluating participants' performance, but their heterogeneity inevitably means that the criteria they use to assess participants' work is variable rather than fixed.

Personal occupational values

"I would say it's your story, it's always your story... They [the editors] have the final say, but if there is something I genuinely didn't feel comfortable with it's also my role to say 'no, that's factually incorrect', or 'I think you're skewing things', or 'that's not right and I'm not happy to put my name to it if that's what you're going with'. Ultimately they could pull the story and I'd not get paid for it I suppose, but for my integrity I wouldn't let something go out that wasn't correct." [Journalist F]

In their analysis of teachers' interpretation of educational goals, Priestly et al (2012) observe that agency is informed by an individual actor's own interpretation of the possible options available to them, as well as the social and material conditions in which they are operating. The variation in participants' interpretation of, and attitude towards, similar kinds of bureaucratic conditions and occupational and organisational objectives illustrates the role participants' personal values and individual experiences play in informing their own expectations and evaluation of their work practices. This in turn mediates their attitude towards, and compliance

with, the priorities delineated by the evaluative mechanisms employed by their employer and the expectations of their consumers.

Journalists, for example, hold different views on the manner and means by which information should be elicited from interviewees, particularly with regards to practices like attending funerals. While some participants felt that it was inappropriate to ask an interviewee questions about matters unrelated to the topic on which they have agreed to talk (e.g. asking someone to comment on speculation about their career or private life when the topic of the interview is the charity they have set up in memory of a family member), others prioritised the public interest of a story (either as a commercial and/or societal good) above the privacy of the individuals involved. Equally, participants may hold a general view on a particular newsgathering practice, but that view is usually flexible and subject to change depending on the particular circumstances in which those practices are being employed, the manner in which they are being performed, and the use to which that information is being put (e.g. the nature of the interviewee and whether their role in the story is as a public or a private figure). Their personal view as to where these boundaries should be drawn is informed by their interpretation of their role as a journalist (e.g. as an interpreter of events, a watchdog of democracy, a disseminator of information), and this in turn shapes their conception of doing a 'good' job, and the degree to which they are prepared to comply with the practices and behaviours anticipated and rewarded by their employer. The discretionary nature of their work, and the means by which their performance is managed and assessed, means that this compliance or resistance is part of the on-going negotiation of the practice and product of their work, rather than an outright rejection of the position held by their employer (where participants did explicitly reject the ethos of their employer, they usually sought to move to, or freelance for, another organisation more in line with their own values). Solicitors and teachers similarly draw on their own conceptions of 'good work' (including personal integrity, their interpretation of their role, and their attitude towards the values and systems of their employer) to inform the negotiation of their practice.

Participants vary in the value they attach to the different aspects of their work and in their understanding of the relative importance of these different aspects with regard to their obligations to their employer and others. Their interpretation of, and concern for, these different facets, shaped by their personal occupational values, informs the way they interpret and seek to meet the demands of the other parties to whom they

are obligated (e.g. employers, clients, audiences, pupils, parents, regulatory bodies). Responsibility for their work (conferred by their operational discretion and liability for its outcome) invokes in participants a sense of personal accountability for the practice of their work, which both supplements and mediates the influence of the mechanisms of accountability employed by the organisation itself.

Summary: doing a 'good' job

The above discussion describes the series of practices through which participants are held to account for their performance by measures that monitor the quality and the quantity of their work. These mechanisms are concerned with the outcome rather than the performance of work, which means that they exert little direct control over participants' practice, but strongly influence participants' interpretation of the objectives and product of their work, including their understanding of 'good' work and personal success, their obligations to the consumers of their work (clients, pupils, audiences), and their expectations of, and ambitions for, rewards and career advancement.

Freidson (2001) identifies three ways of organising work: professionalism, bureaucracy and the market. These 'ideal types' are primarily concerned with the question of who controls work (members of an occupation, managers, or consumers) and the implications this has for workers' aims and objectives, and the management and assessment of their performance. The above analysis of the performance management mechanisms that structure their work demonstrates that journalists, teachers and solicitors are all subject, to varying degrees, to the influence of all three types of control. Their employers shape their performance by measuring their output, setting targets and offering rewards (e.g. salary increases, bonuses, promotions, front page headlines) to those who are most 'productive' (e.g. those who bill the most hours, achieve the best exam results, attract the biggest audience). Employers, managers, and regulators monitor and evaluate the content of their output through a combination of internal-informal, internal-formal, and external-formal peer review processes. These reviews are informed by the guidelines and codes of practice set out by regulatory bodies (e.g. SRA, LLA, Ofsted, Ofcom, Independent Schools Inspectorate) who operate on behalf of the occupation and/or the consumer (in maintaining standards), and, in some cases, indirectly on behalf of the employer (e.g. Ofsted examines teachers who are employed by the

state)¹⁹. In addition to these 'official' mechanisms of performance management, participants are also (increasingly) subject to their consumers' assessments of their products and services (e.g. clients, pupils, parents, audiences) with employers using (and increasingly eliciting) consumer feedback to inform their own evaluations. Finally, participants' performance is informed by their own occupational values (including their interpretation of the 'ideal' journalist, teacher or solicitor), mediated by their professional and career ambitions (of which more in chapter seven). Consequently, participants' obligations are many and varied, interlinked but also independent of one another. These obligations are ambiguous and their interpretation dependent upon the perspective from which they are being viewed (e.g. that of their employer, the consumer themselves, the regulator, the occupational group), yet fulfilment of these obligations is central to participants' successful work performance, both in terms of achieving organisational objectives (and securing the rewards associated with this) and in terms of meeting participants' own criteria for 'good' work. The implications of this tangle of responsibilities (and the ensuing multiplicity of criteria by which participants' performance is assessed) will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Being a 'good' worker

The nature and degree of influence performance management mechanisms exert over participants' work varies within and between occupations. In teaching, for example, the use of formal mechanisms of management varies from school to school, particularly between independent and state schools, and between high achieving schools and those considered to be performing poorly (who usually also have more disadvantaged pupils). Some teachers are observed three or four times a term; others are only observed once a year. Some are subject to elaborate systems of monitoring which require them to justify their lesson plans and provide evidence of the dates on which they last marked their books, while others are left pretty much to their own devices (as long as they achieve good exam results). While the senior managers and employers who design and implement these policies and practices determine the structure of their working environment, participants' experience of working in these conditions is shaped by the colleagues and managers with whom they interact day-to-day. This section discusses participants'

¹⁹ SRA: Solicitors Regulation Authority; LLA: Legal Aid Agency; Ofcom: Office of Communications, whose remit includes the regulation of broadcasting.

relationships with their managers and colleagues, exploring the impact of the individual and collective attitudes and behaviours of these characters as they contribute to (and themselves negotiate) the collective working environment.

Supervision

Despite administrative dependence on the mechanisms of performance assessment outlined above, many participants observed that the most accurate way of gauging how colleagues are performing is through 'osmosis', or what Sennett (2013) calls bearing managerial witness to the intangible features of performance (e.g. day-to-day participation in discussions and tasks; willingness to work late; to help others etc.).

"It's impossible to know what everyone is getting up to. It's made easier for us because we work open-plan, but it's only through chatting with other members in my team [that I know what's going on]. That's why we have risk and compliance checks every month, for the very reason that it's impossible to keep on top of absolutely everything all the time."
[Solicitor E]

"I don't have to be in the classroom to know how someone is teaching, I'm in the office all day with them so I know what's been printed and what they're talking about, and I can listen to conversations, I know what kids say as they're walking around, or what some of my tutees say about lessons... I don't mean it at all in a sinister way, but you can see what people are doing and the different ideas people have got... Actually, when you go to observe a lesson it's not a very good picture of what's going on because they put on a show." [Teacher E]

Where rewards are primarily distributed according to the achievement of particular outcomes, participants' working relationships with their managers and colleagues are more dependent on their shared experience of their practice. For O'Neill (2002: 76) this shared experience is central to the development and maintenance of confidence in their colleagues' ability to perform work well: "well-placed trust grows out of active inquiry... extended over time by talking and asking questions, by listening and seeing how well claims to know and undertakings to act [hold] up".

Participants across all three occupations tend to describe the colleagues to whom they report as senior colleagues (or occasionally mentors) rather than line

managers²⁰. Their authority over participants' work is attributed to their greater experience rather than only to their position within the organisational hierarchy. For most, their manager's line managerial responsibilities are performed in addition to (or as part of) their primary role (e.g. journalists are usually line-managed by an editor; solicitors by a Partner or more senior solicitor; teachers by the head of their department or a senior school leader). These roles are primarily concerned with devising or overseeing the implementation of particular organisational strategies or priorities, communicating organisational objectives, and maintaining consistency across the performance of their staff, but also see them performing similar kinds of work to the colleagues they oversee (e.g. taking editorial decisions; giving legal advice; teaching classes), just at a more senior level. Managers are described as allocating and coordinating rather than directing participants' tasks, rarely participating in their execution (except to review work) unless they have been asked for their advice or assistance, or if the person performing the work cannot be trusted to perform the work to the required standard, either because they lack the required expertise (e.g. non-specialist teachers teaching outside their own subject), or because they are not believed to be very good at their job.

The uncertain and unpredictable nature of the work means that, in all three occupations, direction tends to be negotiated rather than imposed, with participants at all levels expected to use their own judgment and personal occupational experience to contribute ideas and to voice concerns. Managers, as more senior members of staff, retain the right to take the final decision over matters for which they are ultimately responsible (e.g. the allocation of work), but participants describe these decisions as being, for the most part, informed by their own ideas and opinions, as well as those of their colleagues. In all three occupations a 'good' worker is someone who can be trusted to get on with their job and deliver the required outcome without having to constantly refer back to their manager for guidance. This means taking responsibility both for making decisions during the course of performing tasks, and for recognising when they need additional help, seeking advice and further instruction as and when it is required.

²⁰ In fact some participants, particularly journalists but also a number of solicitors, were reluctant to label these colleagues 'line managers' because they felt the term did not accurately represent their relationship (and consequently was not commonly used in their organisation).

"I get on really well with my head of department... he's quite confident about my teaching, so he wouldn't be worrying about what I'm doing. I suspect other people in my department might have a different line on it because he's not so happy with their teaching. At the end of the day there's a limit, he can't be in our classrooms all the time because most of the time we're teaching at the same time, so ultimately you're pretty free to do what you want... It used to be the kind of department where we got on very well, but people did their own thing, but now [he's] trying to rein it in a bit more... because the staffing has changed... In the past he felt more confident about letting people do their own thing because he had very good teachers [whereas] now there is a sort of anxiety that you can't quite trust them and they need more help and support so more needs to be put in place for them." [Teacher F]

"You have to be quite independent; we're all under the same time constraints. My line manager doesn't have time for me to be asking her to tell me how to do everything... My boss will leave me stories to run, and if I didn't run any of them she'd probably want to know why, but at the same time it's all about justifying it... because it's all about what's most interesting now, and it might be that story is no longer as interesting as others... you've got to make a judgment call... [I have quite a lot of control over my work], but only because I do what I'm meant to be doing... If my news editor rang me up at 7am and said 'Why are you leading on that? Don't', then I wouldn't. I might say 'Well the reason I'm doing it is this, this and this', and she might say 'OK, I see where you're coming from', or she might say 'No, this is more interesting', and then that's what I would do." [Journalist A]

"You'll always have a Partner working on a transaction even if they're not doing the day-to-day stuff so you can always sound off against them or get their views. [If you disagree with a Partner] it's a debate and you go through the pros and cons and hope that one of you persuades the other that you're correct... Ultimately the Partner will pull rank because they're the ones having to sign off on everything; they're in the firing line if it goes wrong, [but] normally you would have views, you would discuss them and you would come to a joint agreement. [Even in junior roles] I was never told 'shut up, stop talking, this is what we're doing', we've always encouraged debate from everyone because that's what you're there for; anyone could be in a better position to know the answer." [Solicitor A]

"A good editor, a good boss, won't tell you what to do, but they'll be keeping half an eye out, looking over your shoulder, and if they need to they might say 'oh, you could tweak that', or 'switch that around so this is your top line', or 'that's a really interesting angle, why don't you highlight that?'... I think it's more like a mentor-mentee relationship, the editor will know his or her station best, they'll know their patch, and they'll be sort of guiding you, but not instructing you... I've actually been told by editors not to ask before, in a nice way... At one stage, every time I put a bulletin together I was like 'will you check my bulletin for me?' before I'd go to read it and [my boss] would say 'no, no, I trust you, I trust you, I'm sure you've got the right stuff in there... if there's anything you're really stuck on then come and ask, but otherwise you're the journalist on the desk, it's your call.'" [Journalist H]

Analysis of employment data in the 1990s found that more than four in ten of the employees surveyed (and two-thirds of those in managerial and professional jobs) were engaged in some kind of supervisory activity, suggesting that these responsibilities were more widely diffused within organisations than the number of 'official' management positions might suggest (Gallie et al, 1998). The boundary between supervisors and supervisees is similarly blurred in teaching, law and journalism, with many participants in ostensibly non-managerial roles taking on responsibility for guiding or directing the work of others (e.g. overseeing a particular aspect of the curriculum e.g. coursework; supervising or training new or junior members of staff; coordinating colleagues in the course of managing a particular project). What Carter and Stevenson (2012: 491) call "creeping managerialism" has two effects: one is to give participants more control over, and ownership of, certain aspects of the collective work project, distributing these responsibilities more widely within the organisational hierarchy; the other is to pass responsibility for managing performance on to non-managerial staff who are then expected to account for, and are accountable to, each other.

Collective and individual interests: competing allegiances

Discussing ideas and alternative courses of action with colleagues is integral to many participants' strategies for managing uncertainty and dealing with unpredictability in their work, as getting a second opinion or sourcing alternative solutions to a problem enables them to mitigate some of the risk associated with taking decisions. Consequently, they view offering advice, reviewing other people's work, listening to ideas, giving feedback and suggesting alternative solutions or points of view as central to their own roles, as well as those of their senior colleagues and managers.

"If it's a concept I'm less confident teaching or I'm less familiar with I might ask [my colleagues] and say 'well, how would you present this?'. Or if I've tried to explain it to a class and they just haven't got my method at all I'll go to other teachers and say 'this is how I laid it out, they didn't get it, how do you do it? What could I have done differently?'. [Teacher D]

"We bat questions back and forth in our open plan [but] because we're such a small team... if we're stuck... we phone people in the wider office. I was on the phone to someone in [an office in a different city] this morning to get her opinion on something I was thinking about, just for peace of mind really, because that's what you need sometimes, you just need someone to listen to you and say 'oh yep, yep, you're right', and

then you can note on your file that you've spoken about it, and again it's risk management – you're not just gung-ho sending out your own work without [discussing it] with other people.” [Solicitor E]

The unpredictable and uncertain nature of their work requires participants to exercise a certain degree of independence in the performance of their tasks, yet collaborating with colleagues is integral to their strategy for managing this uncertainty. The tensions between independent and collaborative working practices are further complicated by mechanisms of performance management and assessment that rely on collective responsibility while rewarding individual achievement. Collegiate ways of working and mechanisms of quality assurance (e.g. peer review) hold participants jointly responsible for the collective performance of their colleagues, yet individual targets (e.g. exam results, billable hours, audience figures) and the allocation of individual responsibility for the product of their work means that outcome of their performance is assessed in isolation. This competition and collaboration coexists as participants contribute to and assess one another's work, while simultaneously competing for the visibility, accolades and achievements that will lead to promotions, financial rewards, or new opportunities elsewhere.

“Although we're all very supportive and helpful to one another, there is an ingrained amount of, undeniably, competition; I think anyone who doesn't feel it is probably doing something wrong. If I do a great story and one of my colleagues does a better story and it ends up on the front page, much as I like and respect them I'd go home and be 'aarrgh, I'm annoyed'. [But] at the end of the day even if I'm annoyed that somebody has bumped me off the front page with a better story, I'd much sooner we had it than anybody else, you know? We do appreciate that we're pulling the same way, and if we have good stories then it's going to sell more papers or people are going to go to our website and we will be more secure and more popular.” [Journalist G]

“It's so competitive, to the point where if a kid is on a behaviour report some people will give them all ticks and a little comment that says 'perfect, as usual' and I think well, how have you ticked 'brought all his equipment' when he hasn't got a pen? It's as stupid as that, an example where it's obvious that people are lying but they don't want to admit they have a problem with a child... If you always say 'yes, I'm fine' it alienates you from the other staff and masks the problem [but] I think it's because it's competitive; everyone is judged and we have performance-related pay.” [Teacher K]

“Traditional firms are very much based on time-recording... they are very much 'my files, my bills, my clients... [I think this fosters] an unwillingness to help each other, because [you'll get people who want to record an hour of their time on your file if they help you].” [Solicitor F]

The tension between participants' collective and individual interests can be exacerbated by their allegiances within their organisation and to their occupation. Allegiances to different groups can be held simultaneously (e.g. solicitors may wish to bill more chargeable hours than their colleagues, but also want their firm to win more business than its competitors), while the nature of this allegiance can itself vary depending on the circumstances in which participants find themselves. The context in which they apply also plays a role in shaping participants' perceptions of their employer's performance monitoring mechanisms. For some, they are simultaneously a means of 'weeding out' those colleagues who are not pulling their weight and/or of ensuring that their own hard work (or extended working) does not go unnoticed, and a burden on the participant and their colleagues as a collective group.

As journalists, solicitors and teachers, participants often share broadly similar occupational values to their colleagues (the characteristics of which were discussed in chapter four). This creates a sense of collective identity across members of the same occupation. However, in practice this allegiance can cause conflict when colleagues disagree as to the interpretation of these values as they apply to a particular situation. Journalists, for example, vary in their attitude towards approaching and handling interviewees, particularly 'death knocks' (i.e. door stepping someone who has been recently bereaved). Solicitors differ in their opinions as to what is most important when it comes to case management. Some prefer to manage cases as a team, dividing up the work amongst more junior and senior members of staff according to the difficulty of the task because this a more efficient use of time and resources. Others prefer to manage their own caseload because this enables them to build a one-to-one relationship with individual clients, which they believe offers clients a better service (because they always know who to contact if they have any queries) and enables them to give better advice (because the solicitor giving the advice is involved in every aspect of the case).

Teachers vary in their attitude towards inspections, particularly the ways in which teachers can and should (or should not) change their practice in order to achieve a higher grade. For some, tweaking lessons to ensure they met the criteria for an 'outstanding' lesson is a way of giving inspectors opportunities to see that the correct procedures are being followed (e.g. stopping during the lesson to remind everyone of the lesson objectives). These teachers consider these lessons to be the same as any other, but with the features inspectors were looking for more clearly

signposted. For others, making any kind of change to a normal lesson is a form of cheating, enabling colleagues to achieve an 'outstanding' that is neither deserved, nor representative of pupils' day-to-day experience. Where the former might be considered 'players', in that they play the game as it is presented to them, the latter are 'purists', preferring to be authentic rather than adapt their practice (Brown and Hesketh, 2004). These attitudes are not necessarily reflective of their views on the observation process more broadly, but are indicative of the different ways participants reconcile their occupational values with those of the regulator or their employer.

"We had Ofsted in [last year], and I didn't really change much with them, I re-did some bits of lessons, slotted in lots of 'here are the objectives to meet', but still taught the same sorts of things. I was doing an assessment with year eight... and they said 'oh are we doing something different today because Ofsted are in?' and I said 'no we are carrying on [but] what we are going to do is to stop and reflect if they come in, and we will have a discussion about it'... [When I'm being observed it's] a lot more sort of formal, so I do have a very strict PowerPoint, and I do have my objectives really clear, and we will revisit the objectives constantly in the lesson, but at the same time I won't change the activities, I'll do very similar things, because I think otherwise the kids respond differently and they don't know what's going on." [Teacher J]

"I always say I'm happy if I get 'good' in my lesson observation because I know what I do in the lesson observation is what I do every day in the classroom. And some people I know get 'outstanding' in their lesson observations and the rest of the time they are sat behind their desk and I think morally I can live with myself and I'd rather be 'good' consistently than 'outstanding' one day a year - outstanding is not attainable all the time, you can't do it, nobody could. The vast majority of people who get 'outstanding' in lesson observations [have planned their whole lesson according to the Ofsted criteria] and have selected a class they know they're going to be able to achieve that with...it doesn't make you very popular with other colleagues though." [Teacher K]

Performance-related pay is similarly controversial, with some teachers broadly welcoming its introduction (with the caveat that performance must be measured in an appropriate way e.g. pupils' progression rather than their absolute achievement), while others are opposed in principle to a mechanism they consider inappropriate and divisive. Reconciling tensions between participants' collective and individual interests (and differing interpretations of these interests) is central to the establishment and maintenance of the relationships that facilitate the management of uncertainty and unpredictability in these roles.

Social conditions

Participants across all three occupations are relatively consistent in their descriptions of their working practices and the nature of their relationships with colleagues and managers, but their experience of participating in these practices and relationships varies considerably both between organisations and across participants' different relationships. These practices and relationships are central to participants' performance of their work, yet the nature and success of these relationships is dependent on the personalities, dispositions and approaches of the individuals involved. They are also informed by the environment in which these practices and relationships are operating, which itself is determined by the character and ethos of the employing organisation and its senior leaders.

"I've got an editor, I sold her an interview, a profile feature, and she sent me a list of questions... but she's a bit like that, she's a bit of a control-freak. Fine, whatever, I asked the questions – they were all questions I would have asked anyway. Then there are other editors who go 'yep, great, can you give me 1000 words' and you go off and do the story. The best editors are the ones who will come back to you and say 'well, what about this?'. My editor at [a national newspaper] is brilliant like that... she'll come back if she doesn't understand something, or [suggest an angle I hadn't thought of]." [Journalist D]

[On working with Partners] *"It's funny, it varies with every single Partner... I think if you've got certain people who give you a really marked up document and you're not having to think about it you probably get a bit lazy because if they're going to put their own stamp on it anyway I don't need to worry too much about it. Whereas if they're more hands-off you don't want to send out anything that's not completely right so you probably take a bit more care over it. I like a kind of medium, because I do like to take note of feedback and it's nice to have a bit more assurance sometimes [so] you can go, 'ok, fine, they've said that, we've discussed it, I can put that in the document, I know I've done the right thing'." [Solicitor C]*

[On being managed by two different people while teaching on two courses] *"One of them is very on the ball, very... data-driven, focused on making interventions where it's clear that a student is behind, or not keeping up, or not attending as much as they used to, that sort of thing. The other one is much more fatalistic and has an attitude of 'if the students aren't going to work, what can we do? There's only so much time in the week...' I definitely make a lot more interventions with the students on the course where the leader monitors things very closely and things are done in a more structured way. We have done a few for the other course... but if your manager isn't on your back then you're not going to [do as much]... I think in order to be really effective you need to have a really collaborative approach... I've often asked for support with certain students and sometimes had that support and sometimes not,*

but if that support's not there there's a limit to what I'm able to do."
[Teacher C]

Colleagues can also differ in their interpretation of their employer's expectations of them, which can create conflict when they are working on the same project or task. The degree to which this conflict is creative rather than destructive depends greatly on the personalities and relationships involved.

"There have been a few periods of tension with the producer that I work with a lot, and I think she's probably the best journalist I know, but she's been [working on the programme] for a long time and she was quite wedded to the old format of how you do it, so there have been conflicts where I've said, for example, 'let's not have the structure of 'here's a case, here's a more serious case, here's the really serious case', let's knock them out with the bigger stuff first', 'oh, but that's not the way we do it...the editor won't like it'. So I usually say, 'let's try it for the run through; what have we got to lose? We can always swap it back, but let's at least give it a go'... but I do sometimes have to fight my corner and say 'I understand what you're saying, but this is the way I want to try it, for the run through'." [Journalist B]

The interactive nature of their work, and the negotiation and discussion required to resolve and manage associated uncertainty and unpredictability, is such that the personalities and approaches of individual colleagues and managers (and clients, pupils, parents) play an important role in shaping participants' performance of (and their experience of performing) their work. Participants and their colleagues and supervisors all have to make judgments and decisions about the interpretation of objectives and execution of tasks for which there is no correct or obvious answer. The context in which these decisions are taken is shaped by the personalities involved in these negotiations, which means the discussions themselves can be variable and unpredictable. The organisational and social context in which their job is situated shapes not only participants' experience of that context (e.g. whether their organisation is a pleasant or unpleasant place to work), but also the particular challenges associated with negotiating their performance of the unpredictable tasks that make up the bulk of their work. As a result, understanding and responding to this variability becomes integral to their performance of these tasks.

The organisational ethos and personalities of the people involved in creating the conditions of work are also central to the maintenance or erosion of the conditions under which the collaborative working practices outlined above thrive. In some instances, the collegiate working relationships upon which participants rely have been undermined by management strategies that have sought to regulate work

performance by replacing ad-hoc collaborative practices with more formal decision-making processes. The rigidity of these more structured processes has weakened trust between colleagues, disrupted the fluidity of their decision-making, and discouraged the more casual discussions that participants rely on to help them solve problems.

“We used to all have lunch at the same time, which was great because you could sit and chat as a department, but now some of the department will have an early lunch and some will have a late lunch so you can’t get together... It’s had a huge impact... it’s completely changed the school, you don’t see people anymore because there’s no time. And the irony is, when we used to have long dinners we mainly talked about school, what lessons we’d had, what worked and what didn’t, and what was going on with Sammy in Year 9 and had anyone else noticed anything... But the new head wants everything formal, minuted and memoed [so] now it’s got to the point where people are arguing because they’re saying ‘you didn’t inform me that this was happening’... The other day there was an almighty fall-out over something that would never have happened before because now people are afraid they’ll get into trouble with the head so they want everything on a memo... I have a colleague who keeps a folder and photocopies everything she ever writes to anybody so that nobody can say she didn’t minute it – she insists it’s what enables her to sleep at night.” [Teacher G]

These cases illustrate the complexity and instability of the social conditions under which participants work, the role individuals (managers and colleagues, as well as participants themselves) play in mediating the organisational guidance and mechanisms of control that determine these conditions (and the way directives are interpreted and re-interpreted as they are re-issued throughout the chain of command), and the delicate balance between trust and collaboration on the one hand, and competition and suspicion on the other.

Summary: being a ‘good’ worker

Managers (on behalf of their employer) determine the objectives and allocation of participants’ work but they rely on the participants themselves to “deliver the goods” (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2004: 437). Participants in all three occupations describe their managers as senior colleagues, emphasising their greater professional expertise and experience over their status within the organisational hierarchy. This joint occupational membership seems to reduce the divide between participants and their supervisors (or participants and the colleague they supervise), which may in part explain how and why these relationships are characterised (in general) by

consensus through negotiation (Skovsgaard, 2014). However, that consensus is sought through negotiation does not mean that consensus is always possible, nor that conflict is avoided. In practice, relationships between participants and their managers and colleagues are characterised by consensus and conflict in equal measure, and the degree and product of the consensus or conflict varies depending on the nature and context of the issue or circumstances upon which they are trying to agree. These relationships and the conditions under which they operate are neither wholly harmonious nor wholly contentious, nor can they be placed somewhere on a spectrum between the two. Rather, conditions of consensus and conflict exist simultaneously, creating continuous challenges for participants as they seek to reconcile some differences and accentuate others. The interpersonal work required to manage and negotiate these conditions means that the personalities, attitudes and behaviours of individual managers and colleagues play a central role in determining both the character and demands of these working relationships, which in turn informs the practice and outcome of participants' work.

The conditions and obligations of participants' work

Operational autonomy under organisational conditions

In all three occupations, participants' performance is guided by indirect systems of organisational control (e.g. performance indicators, peer review processes, organisational objectives). Managers retain control over the more significant strategic decisions (e.g. a Partner will have the final say on legal strategy because they retain liability for this), but in general participants are responsible for taking the day-to-day operational decisions that determine the precise outcome of their work, with line managers providing further advice or instruction on request rather than as a matter of course. Organisational expectations regarding performance outcomes are communicated through "numerical indicators [rather than] personal instructions" (Lehndorff, 2002: 424), and organisational objectives are realised through mechanisms of assessment that measure and reward outcomes, bequeathing responsibility for work performance to the participants themselves. In this way, participants' performance and associated rewards (e.g. pay increases) are ever more closely associated with the goals of their employer (and therefore the collective achievements of their colleagues), but are primarily determined by their own individual performance. The operational autonomy which facilitates participants'

performance of their uncertain and unpredictable work tasks (outlined in chapter four), is mediated by the performance management and assessment mechanisms senior leaders use to direct them towards achieving their employers' organisational objectives.

Some authors describe this system of governance as regulated, licensed or managed autonomy (e.g. Curran, 1990; Berry, 2012), on the grounds that employers facilitate employees' discretion within a particular set of organisational constraints. This is true up to a point, but is an incomplete description of the nature of, and explanation for, the position journalists, teachers and solicitors occupy within their organisations, and consequently could be misleading if relied upon as a representation of the demands this way of organising work makes of the people performing it. Where the terms 'operational' and 'strategic' autonomy describe the conditions of discretion (i.e. the aspects of work over which participants have some control), terms like 'regulated' or 'licensed' attribute influence over these conditions, inferring discretion to be in the gift of the employer. This is an accurate description of the structure of the relationship, but it does not fully describe the material conditions of the relationship, nor how it is negotiated in practice. The previous chapter noted that participants' work objectives were specified but incomplete. Sennett (2009: 234) describes this kind of ambiguity as an "instance of applying minimum force", and this is central to the way in which the operational autonomy granted to participants functions in practice. Employers (through managers) provide direction for participants' work; they rarely instruct them in their work. In bequeathing responsibility for achieving their specified objectives to employees, employers distance themselves from practice of the work by applying force around the edges (e.g. through mechanisms of performance assessment that prioritise particular outcomes) but minimising their involvement in their realisation. In this system of governance, where responsibility for achieving organisational objectives is distributed amongst participants, their employers' influence over the practice of their work "is both strong and shapeless" (Sennett, 1998: 57). Participants are not free to choose what to do, but equally they are not given much help either. In facilitating rather than instructing participants in their work, employers are absolved from the responsibility of identifying and implementing the means by which their tasks can be carried out (Sennett, 1998). This operational autonomy brings with it a number of challenges, not least the fact that participants are responsible for the realisation of organisational objectives, yet limited in the means by which they can achieve these

outcomes. They are also responsible for reconciling the interests of all the individuals and groups who have a stake in their work.

A web of obligations

The conditions of work outlined in this chapter combine features from all three of Freidson's (2001) 'ideal type' models of work, including the fluidity associated with systems of work controlled by markets, the flat hierarchies of modern bureaucracies, and the primacy of occupational expertise as the basis for senior colleagues' authority. This combination of influences means that participants are partially controlled by (and obligated to) all three groups, but under the absolute authority of none.

This multiplicity of obligations is best described as a "web of commitments" (Solbrekke, 2008 drawing on May, 1996), because this encapsulates the complexity of these entangled relationships and the extent to which participants themselves, at the centre of the web, are responsible for resolving the tensions between them. As Bauman (2000: 64) observes, "when the authorities are many they tend to cancel each other out, and the sole effective authority in the field is the one who must choose between them". Solbrekke (2008) identifies a number of groups to whom professional workers may be accountable, and in so doing he draws a number of distinctions: between employers and colleagues, between professional disciplines and wider society, and between individuals and their families. These more nuanced categories of obligation facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of the conflicts and dilemmas that inform participants' daily work practices because they raise questions as to the detail, nature, importance and strength of the relationships participants have with (and across) these different groups. These are central to analyses of participants' obligations, because to understand the practical implications of their 'web of obligations' it is necessary to take account of the differences between participants' own understanding of their responsibilities to individual clients or to wider society, and the ways in which the other groups in their web (e.g. the occupational group to which they belong; their employer; the bodies that regulate them) understand the same relationship. Nor are the different threads of the web independent of one another. The authority granted to the consumers of their work (e.g. through organisational policy, measures of performance assessment that rely on their feedback) moderates the managerial authority of their employer, complicating the employment relationship between the

participant and their employer, as well as informing the service relationship between the participant and their client (or pupil or audience) (Fuller and Smith, 1991; Beynon et al, 2002; Ackers, 2014).

Journalists' obligations to their audience, for example, are not straightforward; they are mediated by their responsibilities to their employer, their colleagues (as a collective body of journalists) and the obligations of occupational membership more broadly, as well as their duty to themselves and their personal reputation. Audiences are clients for whom journalists are paid to create news stories, and in this guise their obligations are informed by their employer's business priorities. However, audiences are also members of the public, for whom journalism (in the eyes of participants) is a 'public service' and to whom journalists are expected to deliver news which is 'in the public interest', the content and character of which is informed by the collective occupational standards advocated by occupational associations (e.g. the National Union of Journalists), and regulatory bodies (e.g. Ofcom) as these are interpreted by individual journalists in the context of their own understanding as to the purpose of journalism and their personal occupational values (discussed in Chapter four).

The number of groups to whom teachers are accountable similarly complicates these participants' responsibilities to their pupils. Their employers, concerned with their school's reputation and performance in league tables, prioritise the product of education, particularly exam results, focusing on the criteria used to evaluate school performance (e.g. Ofsted criteria), while teachers themselves are often more concerned with the educational experience. Teachers' personal priorities are often echoed by occupational associations (e.g. teaching unions), but interpretation of the best means of achieving these (and of meeting and/or mediating the expectations of employers) varies across teachers, and between teachers and their occupational representatives. The parents and pupils who consume education want (or expect) to achieve both high marks and 'a good education', but where teachers and school leaders are concerned with the consistency of experience and achievement across the whole school, parents and pupils are primarily concerned with their own individual outcomes. Overarching all of these concerns is government policy on education, which both informs and is mediated by the individual priorities of these multiple groups.

Solicitors' obligations are equally diverse, requiring them to balance the financial, commercial and regulatory priorities of their employer with their own personal responsibilities to the regulator, their clients, the law and the courts. Managing their clients' expectations and understanding of the legal and financial implications of the positions they would like to hold, and the courses of action they choose to follow, requires participants to separate the commercial financial interests of their firm (whether those are concerned with making a profit or limiting costs) from the personal financial interests of their client. Yet they must also retain an awareness of the implications of their organisations' financial circumstances and priorities on their ability to conduct matters as their client may wish (e.g. a solicitor funded by legal aid may be limited in the time they are able to commit to individual clients, or to the speed with which they can respond to queries; in commercial firms, larger or more regular clients may be more of a priority than smaller, more infrequent ones). As with journalists and teachers, solicitors vary in their views as to how these interests can and should be reconciled.

Occupational values and ideas about 'professionalism' within occupations are not uncontested; for some they are about adhering to someone else's 'code of conduct', for others they are about association with and representation of a particular set of views. A third group might consider professionalism to be about acting according to a particular set of personal values and objectives. Often, as discussed previously, they can be all or any of these, depending on the circumstances. The priorities of employers and consumers are similarly dynamic; they vary within and between organisations and clients, audiences or pupils. Participants in all three groups are subject to a multiplicity of obligations, many of which conflict with one another, but this does not mean it is necessary (or even possible) to identify with or prioritise the values or interests of one group over another. The economic imperative to make a profit, for example, is not always at odds with occupational concerns regarding the quality or purpose of work; a reputation for high quality work can be good for business (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2008; Allsop, 2010; Skovsgaard, 2014). To see these obligations as being in opposition misrepresents the nature of the tension between them, and also overly simplifies the demands the tensions between them make of the people seeking to reconcile them. For participants, it is not a case of choosing one side over the other, but rather a constant and on-going process of negotiation and re-negotiation of their responsibilities to all of these different groups on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

The precise nature of their commitments is unique to each participant, because the role negotiation and discussion plays in the interpretation and execution of tasks means that performance of their work is shaped by a multitude of influences that are unique to the particular context in which it is being performed (e.g. the personalities of colleagues, the ethos of senior managers, the characteristics of clients or pupils). The way participants interpret their obligations can also vary with changes in their circumstances, for example if they anticipate a promotion or a change of job (Daniel, 1973). Few participants had been (or expected to remain) with the same employer for the whole of their career, which means they are subject not only to the critical gaze of their current employer, but also to that of potential future employers. This further complicates their understanding of their obligations and allegiances, as their 'value' in the labour market is determined not only by their own personal reputation, but also by the collective reputation of the organisation(s) for whom they have previously worked (this will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven).

Significantly, their web of obligations expands as well as limits participants' field of action. Their employers' conception of 'good work' is mediated by the criteria consumers and regulators use to assess the same thing. The differing priorities of these groups across multiple loci of control, while limiting participants' strategic freedom, create a certain amount of space within which they can operate. Mechanisms of accountability give participants the opportunity to justify their activities by making claims as to how their interpretation of strategic objectives, and their intended method of achieving these, delivers the outcomes desired by their employer (and/or the requirements of their consumers). However, within this system of accountability this (partial) freedom is accompanied by a number of other conditions.

Accountability and trust

In the 1950s, during the course of his work examining pay disputes, Elliott Jaques developed the idea of using time as a means of measuring the degree of responsibility associated with a particular task (Jaques, 1956). He found that the time-span of discretion, or "the maximum period of time... during which [the employee] was authorized and expected to exercise discretion on his own account in discharging the responsibilities allocated to him" was a good indicator of the level of responsibility (and consequently the demands) associated with a particular job (Jaques, 1956: 32). This concept (of using the degree to which participants are 'left alone' to perform their work as a measure of the discretion and demands of their

role) is helpful because it raises questions as to the visibility (or invisibility) of their work practices, and the impact this has on their conditions of work.

The mechanisms by which journalists, teachers and solicitors are held accountable for their work focus primarily on the outcome of their performance (i.e. have they achieved the outcomes they are expected to achieve – have enough hours been billed, are cases compliant with regulatory guidance, are news stories appealing to the target audience, are pupils achieving the expected grades). The practice of the work, the means by which these outcomes are achieved, is relatively invisible, and by Jaques' measure of discretion participants spend most of their time working independently of any supervision. However, one product of this system of organising work is that it makes participants' performance more visible in other ways: firstly, by focusing on individual achievement; and secondly, by illuminating their practice through peer and consumer review. The linking of output to effort that enables these mechanisms of performance management has been facilitated by the development of new technologies and tools which enable employers, and employees, to view an individual's performance at a glance (Green, 2006). Solicitors, for example, describe assessing how many hours their colleagues have been working for by checking when they logged into the firm's case management system. In many firms, the number of billable hours individuals have accrued is widely disseminated, and solicitors are 'ranked' according to their position. Teachers are expected to deliver 'data drops' to senior leaders on demand, detailing the grades their pupils have and are expected to achieve, and enabling managers to compare their predicted outcomes with those of their colleagues teaching other classes across the year group, department and school. Journalists' work is even more visible, made public as soon as it is published, both the content and the size of the audience easily accessible to everyone in the organisation (and remaining so for longer as broadcasts and articles are increasingly made available on websites). The adoption of these tools eliminates some of the barriers between employees and senior managers, so that their performance is now "on show" and therefore visible to everyone, rather than filtered through their immediate supervisor (Sennett, 1998). It also leaves participants more exposed, both to praise and criticism, and more inclined to take an interest in the performance of their colleagues.

In addition, the practice of distributing supervisory responsibilities amongst employees (rather than leaving them to the 'official' managers) creates supervisory relationships horizontally between participants and their colleagues, as well as

vertically between participants and their managers. This 'dual-structure' is described by Warhurst and Thompson (1998: 17) as a "shadow division of labour" because these supervisory relationships supplement rather than supplant more traditional vertical hierarchies of management. The implications of this for employees' relationships with their colleagues is perhaps best illustrated by analysis conducted by Green (2006), who found that while in 1986 29 per cent of employees cited pressure from colleagues as determining how hard they worked, by 1997 this had risen to 57 per cent and had remained at 50 per cent in 2001. Green (2006: 57) suggests that this marked increase indicates, "peer pressure had come into its own as a source of labor intensification". The (critical) gaze of senior leaders, supervisors and colleagues is further amplified by the surveillance of their consumers. The solicitation of consumer feedback makes their evaluative capacity a "constant yet elusive presence... in the sense that workers may always feel someone is looking over their shoulder" (Fuller and Smith, 1991: 11). Although largely left alone in the practice of their work, participants are rarely on their own (i.e. out of sight) in the performance of it.

Accountability and insecurity

With the visibility that accompanies individual accountability comes increased anxiety over performance. While holding participants accountable for their performance gives them a certain amount of freedom in their work activity, the mechanisms used to facilitate this system can also contribute to a culture of mistrust and insecurity (O'Neill, 2002). In order to evidence their achievements, participants must spend additional time justifying their decisions and demonstrating that they are meeting the objectives they are employed to achieve. Meeting this demand can take time away from their primary tasks, particularly when they are required to provide additional documentation to justify their activities (this is especially true for teachers, but also for solicitors, who are required to demonstrate their compliance with regulatory guidance). When consumers play an important role in reporting on their performance, this burden is increased as "everyone has to record the details of what they do and compile evidence to protect themselves against the possibility, not only of plausible, but of far-fetched complaints" (O'Neill, 2002: 50). These additional tasks illustrate how the complex relationship between participants' myriad obligations, the mechanisms of performance management that evaluate work outcomes rather than direct participants' practice, and the unpredictable nature of

their work serves to create further uncertainty in their job at the same time as it facilitates management of the uncertainty central to their work tasks.

In her analysis of mechanisms of accountability as they are experienced by those being held accountable, Sinclair (1995) identifies two discourses of accountability (a structural and a personal discourse), which offers insight into the gap between these mechanisms of accountability as they are employed by those holding employees to account, and the practices which sustain this means of performance management as they are experienced by those held accountable. While structural discourses of accountability are rational, non-emotive contracts, where accountability “can be ‘delivered’ to, and extracted from, others by following procedures”, those held accountable can experience accountability quite differently, as “chasm-like”, where the uncertain and unpredictable nature of the work is exacerbated by a lack of guidance, leaving employees feeling exposed and vulnerable (Sinclair, 1995: 232). The degree and nature of this anxiety is in part determined by participants’ own attitude towards their role and responsibilities, but it is also shaped by the composition of their work tasks and conditions as they comprise a whole job, and the level of effort they are required to exert in order to fulfil these myriad obligations. This is discussed further in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter asked how the performance of journalists, teachers and solicitors is managed and assessed, and considered the effect these conditions and mechanisms of management have on their experience and the obligations of their work. The answer is that “domination from the top is both strong and shapeless” (Sennett, 1998: 57), creating conditions in which participants are obligated to strive towards ever greater productivity while also being responsible for devising the means of achieving it (and for holding their colleagues to account). Participants in all three occupations sit in the centre of a web of obligations (professional, commercial, ethical and personal), and are responsible for resolving the tensions between these different threads. Performance is assessed through mechanisms of management that focus primarily on the deliverance of particular outcomes (e.g. targets, peer review, consumer feedback) rather than the means by which objectives are achieved. This is a mixed blessing, in that the discretion this enables gives participants space to perform their work as they see fit as long as they deliver

the expected outcomes, yet the choice of indicators (e.g. exam results, billable hours, audience numbers) and continued organisational control over the allocation and distribution of tasks places certain limits on their options while simultaneously rewarding one (simplified) component of their overall task. The work required to evidence their practice is also an additional burden on their time. The implementation and impact of these mechanisms varies depending on the organisational circumstances in which they apply (i.e. the ethos of their employer) and the personalities of, and relationships between, participants and their managers and colleagues. In addition, participants' own interpretation of their role and purpose informs their attitudes towards, and expectations of, these conditions, obligations and relationships, which in turn shapes the way they personally understand and are able to manage this complexity.

Having explored the nature and conditions of journalists', teachers' and solicitors' work, the next chapter turns to the nature of their job, exploring the breadth of their activities, the pace of their work and the length of their working day, and considering how the relationship between their tasks and their time shapes participants' experience of their roles.

Chapter 6

The composition of participants' jobs and their organisation of tasks and time

This chapter examines the number and variety of journalists', teachers' and solicitors' activities, the pace of their work and the length of their working day, and considers how the relationship between their tasks and their time shapes participants' experience of their jobs.

Number and variety of participants' activities

Understanding the nature and enactment of work tasks and the means by which their performance is managed and assessed is central to understanding the demands work makes of the people performing it, but to gain a more complete understanding of participants' experience of performing their work it is also necessary to understand how these different activities and conditions interact in the composition of their job.

Journalists

The process of identifying and presenting news stories requires journalists to participate in a variety of activities, including: monitoring information sources to identify stories; conducting documentary, telephone and physical research to confirm details and investigate leads; identifying and sourcing interviewees (e.g. through social media, press offices); conducting interviews over email, the phone and in person; visiting sites to take photographs or record audio and/or visual material; writing scripts, reports or feature articles; presenting stories (e.g. reading news bulletins, doing voice-overs for radio packages, presenting pieces to camera); and publicising articles, programmes and news events (e.g. through social media, live-blogs).

"I read for several different stations that are owned by the same company [so] I'll read about eight bulletins an hour, six pre-recorded, two live, and some longer bulletins at the top of the hour and half hour. In between times, when I'm not on air, I'm working on stories... I need to work out what's going on in the news today. We have various diaries

etc., so we know certain events are happening, or you might just see something on a social network or other media outlet – you might see something's blown up or crashed... so we confirm the details, ring up and do interviews, record the interviews, edit them into audio packages, write them and put them to air. I also do online content and social media, so you're tweeting about things, putting articles up, taking pictures... you do a lot of multitasking. On the one hand you're chasing someone, but you need to be reading these bulletins and doing this and doing that and updating this online... sometimes you can be working on half a dozen stories simultaneously where you've put a call in on that and the press office are looking into it for you and you've left a message with someone else, so you're doing different things at the same time.” [Journalist A]

“Obviously the role of a journalist has changed massively... when I started I always worked with a cameraman, always worked with an editor, didn't use any form of technology in that way. Now I can use a camera, I can use editing, it's basic, but I can do it... and obviously you have your set programme times, but also you tweet information, you tweet stories, you've got the website. For news outlets their websites are rolling news, even for programmes, so you'd be writing copy for other journalists, for other outlets, websites, you might be blogging about it... [If I get called out on a story] the first thing I do is speak to people on the ground, ring my news editor or producer to say 'this is what's happening', the second thing I do is get my phone out, send a tweet, take photos, tweet those photos, and then you use that to publicise your six o'clock bulletin.” [Journalist F]

The journalist's primary role is to create the news stories by monitoring, analysing and collating information, but they also participate in the production of news items (e.g. editing, recording visual material, taking photographs, putting together audio packages with interview clips, uploading content to websites). In addition, they are responsible for publicising their news stories and programmes through social media, and are expected to produce material for other outlets (e.g. their primary role may be to create and deliver news bulletins on the radio, but they may also be expected to write companion blog posts for the radio's website). Rather than specialise in a particular medium (e.g. print or broadcast), participants are increasingly working across both, while also creating additional content to be delivered online. Participants observed that these additional production and promotional tasks were a fairly new development in their portfolio of activities, as many of these tasks were until recently performed by colleagues who specialised in the production and delivery of editorial content. Where they might previously have had someone to help them with the production of their news content (a cameraperson, a photographer, a sound engineer, an editor), participants are now doing much, if not all, of this themselves.

Teachers

Teachers engage in the widest range of activities of the three occupations, participating in pastoral, disciplinary and managerial as well as teaching, organisational and administrative activities. These include: managing behaviour (e.g. dealing with bullying; uncooperative pupils), administrative activities (e.g. inputting data into online databases; photocopying and preparing resources for lessons; ordering and organising equipment), running extracurricular activities (e.g. after school clubs, sports teams), providing pastoral support (e.g. tackling poor performance; dealing with personal problems affecting school work, including health issues or difficulties at home; taking responsibility for a tutor group; delivering PSHE lessons), supervising or coordinating other members of staff (e.g. managing teachers in particular departments or year groups; leading professional development groups; liaising with lab technicians, learning support staff, social workers), mentoring (e.g. of newly qualified teachers; pupil premium or gifted and talented pupils), and organising people, timetables or activities (e.g. organising field trips; conducting risk assessments; organising homework schedules; organising assessments; departmental responsibility for a particular group of pupils e.g. Key Stage 3). These activities are interspersed with being 'on duty' at various points during the week to cover detention, breaks, homework sessions, and other lessons. This is in addition to their primary role of engaging and instructing pupils in their subject.

"A teaching day consists of getting in early, not sitting down all day, and doing about 4000 jobs. So it's seeing your kids as a pastoral person, so you're looking after a tutor group so you see your tutees, sort out any problems they've got. Invariably in a group of tutees there's always someone who's got something fairly major going on, death of someone, divorce, injury, so there's always someone you're on the look out for... Then it's putting on different hats throughout the day, so into Year 7s, tiny kids, loads of activity, loads of enthusiasm, through to GCSE kids... completely different mind set, less active, less entertaining, more focused towards getting some results. Then they go, you're on break duty for ten minutes, you're in the computer room seeing kids about homework or something. Bell goes again, sixth form group walks in... pushing the top ones, you've got two kids who have applied to do geography at Oxbridge who are constantly pushing the boundaries and asking questions and demanding things of you. And then you'll be out on the games field or something, completely different again, sorting out a rugby team." [Teacher E]

These additional activities bring their own challenges, which are often very different to those teachers face when teaching their subject.

“I find the pastoral side of things harder than the actual being a teacher side of things actually, so working with my form I find the most frustrating part of my day because it’s more [about the] general issues they have with their life, and that’s what I’m trying to really work on in my role as a form tutor. We do a lot of circle time this year, which has really helped me to get to know my form, so having general discussions about things and debates on things, and that’s been useful. And again questioning them a bit more about behaviour: ‘this teacher has been complaining about you, let’s hear your feedback on that...’.” [Teacher J]

“They [the school] want you to have a good knowledge, a good subject knowledge, but they’re only really interested in that if you can turn it into targets and statistics... They want someone who can analyse data, and it’s becoming far less about whether you can give a really good analysis of a Wordsworth or Keats poem [and much more about] whether you can understand the data of your class... the monitoring, setting targets, viable targets, set a viable target then add on another two levels or two grades, because that’s what they expect, and then find ways of pounding that child to death until they get to that target.” [Teacher G]

As with journalists, teachers’ activities go far beyond their primary role of delivering the academic curriculum, encompassing a wide range of additional tasks concerned with supporting and monitoring pupils’ performance. Not only are teachers responsible for instructing pupils in their subject, they are also responsible for ensuring that pupils are in a position to benefit from this instruction (e.g. managing behaviour, providing pastoral support), monitoring pupils’ academic development, and delivering additional extracurricular and development activities outside their area of expertise. Where journalists are responsible for producing and publicising as well as creating content, teachers are responsible for monitoring, supporting and enabling pupils’ performance, as well as educating them in their subject.

Solicitors

While journalists engage with a broad range of topics in their work, solicitors tend to specialise in a particular area, sometimes even focusing on a specific aspect of a particular area (e.g. not only do they specialise in private client work, but they specialise in tax in private client work). However, despite specialising in particular fields of knowledge solicitors participate in a similarly broad range of activities, engaging in marketing, administration and organisational as well as advisory tasks. For solicitors, day-to-day activities include: assessing costs (e.g. explaining costs to

clients; identifying whether their case is 'in scope' for legal aid); talking to clients (to identify the initial problem, understand the context, explain options and solutions); corresponding directly with clients, experts, solicitors and agencies representing the opposing side (e.g. via email, letter, telephone, meetings); conducting documentary research and seeking expert advice (e.g. to clarify issues; identify solutions); drafting documents; supervising junior members of staff (e.g. legal trainees; paralegals; newly qualified solicitors); and bringing in new business (e.g. preparing and presenting pitches to prospective business clients; networking with intermediaries who can introduce clients to the firm; preparing bids in response to tenders for services).

"I think to excel within a firm you need to be good at marketing, business development, eventually you have to be able to stand on your own two feet and bring in work to pay your way... The invitation [to tender for work] will probably go to a Partner because they are well known, and then they would involve a solicitor or two solicitors and say 'lets put this together' and the solicitor would do most of the hard yards in putting it together and then go back to the Partner and take it from there."
[Solicitor K]

"I would be expected to bring in quite a lot of my own work, so you are trying to develop relationships with financial advisers, accountants, barristers if you use them... and it's a lot of socialising and small talk and networking lunches and standing up to talk about yourself and why should we use you." [Solicitor H]

"[The client] rings the legal advice line, explains their problem to an operator who has had training on how to diagnose if something is in the scope of legal aid, the operator says, 'on the face of it, this matter is in scope'... and then they put the call through to us. We then take some initial information from them and we, as the specialists, then have to assess whether it really is in scope, because the operators aren't legally qualified so they can't make that decision – if they are in two minds they put it through." [Solicitor I]

As with journalists and teachers, solicitors' activities go beyond those associated with their advisory role to include a variety of financial, administrative, and supervisory tasks (e.g. billing, pitching for business), many of which would traditionally be associated with other job roles (e.g. administrators, Partners).

Intensity of work

The large number and wide range of tasks participants are expected to perform means that they have a large amount of work. There is a consensus among participants in all three occupations that their workload often exceeds their capacity, and this is attributed to two different kinds of pressures: one is the quantity of the work they are expected to complete; the other is the speed at which they are expected to complete it.

Journalists

Newsreaders and journalists reporting on daily news stories are expected to deliver new and updated news stories daily or even, in the case of newsreaders, hourly. These participants work to very short deadlines, perform multiple tasks simultaneously, and are expected to update their content increasingly frequently.

“You’ve got the pressure of finding local content and getting stories, ringing people up and convincing them to talk to you, convincing them to do an interview while the phone is crackling away and you can hardly hear them, and all the time is ticking away because you know you’re on air in ten minutes, and after that, and after that. And you’ve got to do the online stuff... There’s demand for content to be constantly updated, that’s the thing, because a story will get old... so there’s that constant demand, especially with things like social media, news breaks immediately [snaps fingers] there’s such a demand to be first, so much demand to be quicker about it... So there’s a lot of work, there’s not much time, and there’s a lot being asked of you. And increasingly, like in a lot of industries, there are a lot of cutbacks, redundancies. I’ve worked in teams where people have been fired and I’ve been told ‘alright, you’re doing their job as well as your own’. So you get a lot of that, which is a lot of pressure ... I haven’t taken a lunch break in three years. Nobody does in journalism because you don’t, you don’t have time. There aren’t enough staff, the news isn’t waiting for you, it’s still going and going and going. So you go for a cigarette break or you go to take a breather, but you just don’t have time for a break... there’s a real culture of it. Because a lot of the time you’re waiting on other people... essentially every day you ring people up and say ‘can I interview you about x, y and z’, and they say ‘yes, I’m free at 12.30’, or ‘I’ll get back to you’, so you don’t have time to leave the building because you’ll miss an hour’s worth of incoming calls and other things that are happening. You’re so rarely ahead of the game...” [Journalist A]

“I hate the expression ‘reporting in real time’, but that’s effectively what the job is now, and much more so than it was even six months ago, and certainly than it was ten or twelve years ago... There’s more pressure to be the first to get it out... because people don’t want just want to read it anymore, people want pictures, and people want everything basically...”

It still amazes me sometimes, reporters will come back from court and then they'll make a cup of tea and I'm going 'this should be online already'." [Journalist G]

Journalists working on documentaries or current affairs programmes, and those writing longer, more investigative pieces or feature articles, work at a slightly less frenetic pace but face similar kinds of constraints in terms of the amount of work they need to achieve within a short space of time. Freelance journalists in particular can be working on a number of stories for a variety of different clients, all of whom are concerned only with the completion of their own commission.

"If I'm working for twelve different clients or editors, all of them think I'm just doing that [one commission]. I mean they know I'm not, but for them... I had this client meeting yesterday and the woman was like 'so when will you be able to do my website copy?' and I said 'ummmm... before Christmas...?', and she said 'oh, I was hoping to get the copy to the designers by Wednesday'. I know it's only two days work, but that's two days out of the next... it's insane. So obviously I said 'sure', it's £500 of work, I'm definitely going to do it, but it will mean that I'm working tonight, working the weekend..." [Journalist D]

The pressures journalists experience differ slightly depending on the structure of their work. For journalists reading news bulletins, the work is relentless throughout the day, but the cycle of news reporting means that most work tasks come to an end when they complete their shift or submit their piece. For journalists whose deadlines are weeks rather than hours ahead, the pressure is from the quantity as well as the pace of the work.

"I think with [a daily news programme] you've got such a very short time in which to turn things around, but you know that once the programme goes off air, there's nothing you can do about it... and then you start again the next day... so there's pressure, but you know it's going to come to an end! And you're so busy you don't have time to be worried or mull things over. Whereas with [a documentary programme] it's with you for weeks, so there's a lot more 'oh is this person going to ring me back?', 'are we going to get what we want?', 'are we doing the right thing?', etc. etc." [Journalist B]

In both cases, participants are increasingly taking on (or are being allocated) responsibility for the production and publication as well as the identification and investigation of news stories, increasing the intensity of their work as they are expected to perform more tasks in the same amount of time. This leaves them with less time to dedicate to each activity (and less time to think, less time to plan, less time to research), while they are still expected to perform both their original and their

additional activities to the same, or often an increasingly higher, standard (e.g. to find and report stories before anyone else does). While their knowledge of current events is what enables journalists to find and report on news stories for their employer, opportunities to develop and maintain this knowledge are more limited when journalists take on more different tasks.

“I’ve noticed [changes] because of the cutbacks. For example... I was a health correspondent [but] when I left I was replaced by someone called a health reporter to save money, so this health reporter does health stories but also does other stories. If there was a day where there weren’t really any health stories around, I [as health correspondent] would spend that day ringing up my contacts, maybe reading quite specialist magazines, trying to find things, [but] the health reporter will then have to go and cover a fire or something, so they’re not getting that depth of information, the depth of knowledge, not meeting with the BMA for a coffee, which can be seen as a really frivolous thing, but actually I might get an amazing, exclusive story out of that coffee, and even if I don’t get a story from it, an hour together, we’ve built up a relationship, so when they do have that exclusive story, they’re more likely to come to me with it.” [Journalist F]

“I was on a story recently and I met an old colleague... and they’re all being sent on courses on how to use their time more efficiently, but that’s because [the company] wants... them to free up time so they can do more stuff. And a lot of journalists are now having to film and edit their own stuff and that has, I think, probably a detrimental impact on the quality of their journalism because a) during the sort of day lifetime of a particular story, if you’re filming it, editing it etc. etc., you don’t have the spare five minutes to think ‘I’ll just ring so and so about it and see what they think, see if they know anything’... Also, if you’re doing that day in day out you don’t have the time to spend thinking ‘what do I want to do next?’” [Journalist B]

Consequently, although many journalists consider their office hours to be fairly reasonable (especially when they compare themselves to friends who work in other fields, such as law), they often remain ‘at work’ even when they are away from work, maintaining their knowledge of current events or developments in their area of expertise and thinking about their work in order to continue their search for new stories or angles.

“Normally you do leave the office on time. One of the things about being a journalist is that you can kind of work when you want, so you can go home and work, whereas if you’re in financial services or if you’re a lawyer, my friends in those industries work much longer hours than I do. They also get paid a lot more as well...! So although journalism is pressurised, I think on the whole... it’s not too demanding... I see it as a lifestyle, like being a journalist is full-time, 24/7, you’re always looking around thinking about stories and work.” [Journalist J]

“It takes over your life, it isn’t something where you go to work and you come back and it’s finished. You’re always looking... and to me it does feel like a vocation, it does take over your life, because you’re not off the job, ever.” [Journalist, K]

For these journalists work is not so much a discrete activity as a structuring feature of their life.

Teachers

Teachers across all types of school describe feeling under a similar pressure to improve the quality of their teaching (e.g. more comprehensive feedback, more personalised lessons) while simultaneously performing more additional tasks (e.g. collating and monitoring pupil data, performing extracurricular activities). As with journalists, the combination of a large number of tasks alongside a demand for higher quality work means that teachers have less time to perform each discrete task, increasing the pace at which they work.

“Time is a huge thing... the amount that you are expected to mark now, the quality of the marking, the quality of the planning, the differentiation you have to do in the classroom, it just takes hours and hours more than it used to. That is a good thing because I think the kids are getting better lessons, I do think kids are getting better lessons and that’s a good thing, but it does mean that there are huge time pressures now.” [Teacher I]

“There’s always something else to do... Like now the marking policy is every three weeks... but because we’ve been marking these assessments, which is taking forever because we have this feedback sheet where we have to highlight in red what they’ve done well, and in green all the mistakes, and then for every assessed piece of writing they have a level ladder and we have to highlight in red what they’ve achieved and in yellow what they haven’t achieved, write a comment, and then they have to write a comment back to us, and that’s every child, and I have two year 7 classes, four year 8 classes, and two year 9 classes, so eight classes worth of assessments for between 25 and 32 kids. So they’ve been doing assessments for the last two weeks, and before that was half term and I was only just up-to-date with the books every three weeks... but I haven’t looked at the books again... so now all the books need marking again because another three weeks have passed by, but I haven’t had time to do that... Then I’ve got to put all that data [onto the computer]. First of all you put all their marks onto a spreadsheet and then you copy the marks from the spreadsheet – you can’t just copy and paste because it’s from Excel into Sims and you can’t import the data into Sims unless you have exported it first, so you have to either print it off and type it all in, or look from screen to screen, and then put the effort grades in the reports. And then you’ve still got eight sets of books that are now really out of date... and at some point somebody looks at your books and says ‘oh, you haven’t marked these’,

and you feel [awful] about it anyway, even though it's an impossible task." [Teacher K]

"36 periods a week is a full-time teacher's timetable, 36 x 35 minute periods, I teach 34 x 35 minute periods, so technically I get an hour and ten minutes a week to be head of science, and that's out of a timetable that has 40 periods a week." [Teacher B]

Few teachers take a break during the school day. Lunchtimes and gaps between lessons are described as a time to catch up on tasks (e.g. photocopying) or to fulfil additional obligations (e.g. meetings, extracurricular activities, detentions) rather than to take a break from work. Nearly all teachers work in the evenings and/or at least one day at the weekend, and most work at least a couple of days during their holidays as well.

"I'll normally have at least two or three students down for lunchtime detentions. We quite often share the supervision, so if two or three of us have got two or three students in, one will sit in the room supervising them all, while the others get lunch and then swap round. Or we get a take-away lunch from the canteen and bring it back to the dept. Once a week there's normally a department meeting as well, so we have lunch at our department meeting, and we just plan the week ahead." [Teacher D]

"Saturday tends to be my day for catching up on everything... but like I say, it's never enough and if I have a weekend away... that's terrible [because] you feel like you're catching up forevermore and I'm going away [next month] for a spa weekend with my mum, which is lovely, but in my head I'm thinking that's a weekend that I'm not going to get any work done at all, so how am I going to make sure [I catch up]?" [Teacher K]

"I'm probably in school until 7pm most nights. And I've been in since 7-7.30am. Then I'll go home, do some cooking, and then probably do some work after that... and that will be on a kind of cycle. I never work Friday night, so I have that off. But there will be a day of the weekend that I'll spend working all day. So I tend to get in the habit of having one day off, so I'll have one day watching or playing rugby, or doing something with my partner, and one day where I plan for the next week and get things ready, lessons, things like that." [Teacher E]

"[They are] quite long working hours, I mean the amount of planning, you've got marking duties, and I'm not an efficient marker by any means, and then I've got my managerial duties... so the idea that you come in at 8am and leave at 4pm is ridiculous, I mean most nights I'll leave at about 7pm or something... It is quite a high workload, and I think there's a general thing with teachers where Sunday night isn't your own night, you're usually doing something for the next day... A retired teacher recently said to us that she's now got her Sundays free, which is a strange idea..." [Teacher L]

“When I first started teaching revision classes weren’t compulsory... no one did them. And then gradually as time carried on you did revision classes and you were paid for them, and now it’s become part of the job... we’ve got to the point where... it’s expected, the timetable is sent around and you have to fill in when you’re going to turn up in the holidays to give your revision classes.” [Teacher G]

Teachers spend most of the school day in lessons, in meetings or supervising pupils (e.g. lunch duty, detentions, extracurricular activities); consequently most of their planning, marking and monitoring is completed in the evenings or at weekends. Their workload is greater than the number of hours they have available to work during the working day (i.e. in school), which means their own working hours expand to meet the demands of the job.

Solicitors

As with journalists, solicitors’ work varies according to the timescales of their tasks. Solicitors on duty at police stations or at courts have, at least initially, hours if not minutes from the point at which they receive a matter to the point at which they are expected to advise or represent their client at a police interview or in court. Solicitors in private practice often advise on one-off queries that require an immediate response, as well as working on cases which require them to organise their work in order to meet deadlines the following day, week, month or even year.

“There’s usually a [court] list at 10.30am and the [hearings] start at 11am and 12pm. Some clients are really organised; they turn up half an hour before the hearing time, so, wonderful. But then you might have four other people turn up right at 11am, and you know that you’ve got roughly between 11am and 12pm to see everyone and do all the hearings as well, so it can be really time pressured. Sometimes intensely... On average you’ve probably got about 10-15 minutes [reviewing the case with the client], and then the hearing.” [Solicitor B]

“I mean it varies day-to-day... it’s very much based on deadlines. On any one day there might be five or six things that you want to get done, but if a client suddenly calls you at 10 o’clock and says ‘look, we’re really under pressure to get this document amended and re-sent because there’s this investor who needs to sign off at some internal committee – can you get this to us?’ it throws the whole day out, and... as much as they think these things take fifteen minutes, it often takes [a few hours]... and because we’re the lawyers we’re the people who have to get it right.. So that will happen maybe a couple of times during the day... so often it’s 6 o’clock at night and then it’s like ok, now I can start the stuff I wanted to start at 11 o’clock in the morning.” [Solicitor G]

As with teachers and journalists, few solicitors take a break during the working day. Solicitors in private practice also describe being under pressure from clients and colleagues to work quickly, responding to queries immediately and completing tasks as soon as possible. As a result, they are increasingly 'on call' in the evenings and at weekends.

"There is always an urgency... there is always an urgency in modern business to get things done, it's almost 'I don't care what you've got to say, you've just got to get it done'. And it's self-defeating, because you will save much more time if you take longer to set up the project properly instead of making decisions on the fly and changing things as you're going along... Something I've done on these last couple of projects is to take longer, and of course everybody is jumping up and down and saying we could be thousands of documents in by now [but] that's not the point. By going through this process... we will actually save time in the long run. But there's that sort of need for action... I don't know why it is, I don't know if it's a digital age thing or... but there is that need for action, that impatience to get on with things." [Solicitor L]

"It's a very, very time intensive career because everyone wants things done incredibly quickly, people think that it's the be all and end all that something is done today, when if it's done tomorrow it won't matter at all, but sadly if the client wants it done today, you have to do it today... So it's a very stressful job, from the time pressures and just lots of people, also under pressure, passing on the pressure down the line. It's a lot harder now that everyone has a Blackberry and they're contactable 24 hours a day. It's very difficult not to check a Blackberry when you're not at work... I try not to, but I never totally switch off." [Solicitor A]

"I try to keep most of it in the office. I check emails throughout the evening at home normally, but generally try and start work at about 8:30am, I don't take lunch, I try to leave by 6:30-7pm, I try not to take things home, but sometimes you have to. If you're doing something that is not chargeable, you might take it home." [Solicitor G]

When their workload exceeds their capacity (which, for some, is almost always), solicitors stay later in the office or take files home to meet their obligations.

"At the weekend I took five files home with me and worked on them all, but only after my daughter and husband had gone to bed so it wasn't affecting them, so I was up very late into the early hours of the morning on Saturday and Sunday night, and that's really unhealthy because it makes you more stressed, you know, if you find something and you think 'oh, I'm not sure about this, I'm going to have to check this', you go to bed thinking about it and then you're ruminating on it every time you wake up... [Work] never leaves you... it's with you all the time - you can't shake it off! I think it can easily feel like it's out of control as well, because there are not enough hours in the day to do all the work... and it's also very common for lawyers to have more work, bigger workloads, so maybe enough for one and a half or two people, because it's like

being self-employed, you can't turn away work, you have to bring it in, you have to take it, but the bigger your workload gets, the more work you've got to do and then taking it home, generating more and more work so it just gets bigger and bigger. It's that snowball effect." [Solicitor E]

Solicitors in both private and not-for-profit organisations feel under pressure to complete more work in order to bring in more money, whether that is to increase profits or to keep the organisation afloat. Those who work on cases funded by legal aid or charitable donations are also limited in their resources, so perform many support tasks themselves (e.g. keeping up to date with changes in the law – an activity which many private firms support through access to bibliographic databases, the purchase of pre-prepared summary documents, or the employment of a dedicated support team). As for journalists and teachers, solicitors across all fields and organisations are urged to perform more legal work, while also performing other, additional tasks.

Intensive and extensive work effort

As we get closer to each task, we are surprised to find the multiplicity of subsidiary tasks which the same worker must do... Hence we get the characteristic irregularity of labour patterns... Within the general demands of the week's or fortnight's task... the working day might be lengthened or shortened.

E. P. Thompson (1967: 71) – on pre-industrial manufacturing

Analyses of data generated by surveys of individuals in paid work suggest that the intensity of work has been increasing since the 1980s, particularly during the early 1990s and again between 2006 and 2012 (Green, 2006; Felstead et al, 2013; Gallie and Zhou, 2013)²¹. Employment data collected during the 1980s and 1990s indicates that during these decades people in Britain worked, on average, around 37 hours a week (Green, 2006). In 2012 this figure fell to around 34 hours week (Felstead et al, 2013), but by 2015 people in full-time employment were again working 37 hours a week (ONS, 2015). While the average is 37 hours a week, in 2002 it was estimated that around a third of employees regularly worked more than their contracted number of hours (Taylor, 2002), while a 2015 survey of employees

²¹ Intensity of work: the level of effort employees are required to exert to complete their work and the degree to which individuals feel they lack sufficient time to get all their work done.

in management roles reported that over 75 per cent of respondents worked on average at least one extra hour a day (Worrall et al, 2016)²². Data from the Labour Force Survey indicates that in 2015 nearly 1 in 5 (18 per cent) of those in employment and around 1 in 4 (28 per cent) of those in self-employment were working more than 45 hours a week (ONS, 2015). Two of the most commonly cited reasons for working longer hours are the pressure to meet deadlines and, for managers, the need to be constantly 'available' (e.g. checking emails in the evening) (Taylor, 2002; Worrall et al, 2016).

Participants across all three occupations are expected to complete a large amount of work to a high standard while also taking on more different tasks. They have less time than they would like to dedicate to each activity, less time to think, less time to update and maintain their knowledge, and less time to plan, but are expected to perform these activities to an ever-higher standard (e.g. to be the first to find and report on more unique stories while also recording, editing and uploading videos; to give more comprehensive feedback to pupils while also analysing data on their performance; to give clients fuller explanations of costs and cases, while also bringing in new work). Some of these tasks necessarily take priority during the working day (e.g. teaching lessons, putting bulletins together, meeting clients), which means that others are often completed 'after work' instead (e.g. maintaining knowledge; 'thinking through' problems or ideas; professional development activities; administrative tasks like planning, marking and monitoring).

The relationship between tasks and time is central to the nature of the employment relationship, and consequently to participants' expectations and experience of work. Thompson (1967) draws a distinction between task-oriented employment contracts (i.e. where the length of the working day expands or contracts to meet the demands of the task) and those based on timed labour, where employers purchase a specific amount of their employees' time. In the first, the employee is responsible for making and managing work time to complete their tasks; in the second, the employer is responsible for making sure the organisation makes the most of their employees' time during the period in which it has been agreed it will be made available. In a task-orientated employment relationship the task of organising time to ensure individuals can complete their allocated tasks falls to the employee, releasing

²² Of the 2,466 employed and self-employed respondents who participated in the Working in Britain 2000 Survey, 46 per cent of men and 32 per cent of women said they frequently worked more hours in addition to their basic week (Taylor, 2002: 10).

employers from the constraint of having to allocate tasks according to the amount of work an employee could be expected to achieve within a working day, and rendering the boundary between paid work and the rest of their life much more permeable (Thompson, 1967; Beynon et al, 2002; Rubery et al, 2005). All participants' narratives were characterised by the features associated with a task-orientated employment relationship, and most described experiencing at least one of the two outcomes associated with this arrangement: those on 'time-related' contracts (e.g. journalists working shifts) were "working 'flat out' for many of their hours of work", while those on 'results-based' contracts (e.g. solicitors expected to 'bill' a certain amount of money) were working longer hours, both in and outside work, to get their work done (Rubery et al, 2005: 98).

Green (2001) draws a distinction between 'extensive effort' (i.e. the number of hours spent on work) and 'intensive effort' (i.e. the intensity of the work during that time). This distinction is helpful in clarifying the effect these different demands have on the work experiences of individuals operating in these conditions. It also explains how a high degree of work effort can present differently in different work contexts. Where working extensively (i.e. long hours) reduces leisure time, working intensively reduces what Green (2001) calls the 'porosity' of the working day (i.e. there are fewer gaps between tasks, which limits opportunities for rest and recovery). These pressures present differently within and across occupations depending on the structure of the work (e.g. daily news journalists are under intense pressure for the duration of their shift; teachers take a lot of work home with them; solicitors work longer hours in the office, expecting to change their plans to fit in with work and are often 'on call' during the evenings), but the general picture across all three occupations is one of ever more intensive and extensive work effort due to the pace and quantity of work and the length and flexibility of the working day.

'Managing' time

Southerton and Tomlinson (2005) identify three features of work that can cause employees to feel 'pressed' for time: one is the volume of work; the second is the ease with which it is possible to coordinate their time with that of their colleagues in order to complete their tasks; and the third is the degree to which tasks can be dealt with sequentially rather than simultaneously. While the first is concerned with the substantive pressure of a heavy workload (discussed above), the second and third

concern the role the organisation and allocation of work plays in shaping participants' perception and experience of their work time. Examining the configuration of these features as they are presented in participants' narratives helps to illustrate how the conditions of their work contribute to the demand for a high degree of individual effort.

Individual working practices

One common feature of all three occupations is participants' ownership of their own work. While they often cooperate with colleagues, these interactions comprise two people coming together to discuss something before returning to their own assignments rather than a more integrated or sustained collaboration in the performance of the same task. Where participants are working on the same project (e.g. two solicitors working on the same legal case; a producer and a reporter or a group of reporters working on the same news programme; two teachers who are jointly responsible for an extracurricular activity) collaboration is around the coordination and strategic direction of the activities required to achieve the outcome, rather than collaboration in the operational performance of the activities themselves. This is not to say that these colleagues do not share ideas or jointly discuss problems, but that the nature of the collaboration suggests that each participant retains responsibility for their own contribution even as they participate in these discussions; obligations are divided up rather than held collectively. One consequence of this system of allocating responsibility is that it changes the conditions under which participants have access to colleagues during the day-to-day operational performance of work tasks (i.e. when not in the more 'formal' setting of a scheduled meeting, which is specifically designed to create a time during which participants will come together to discuss their work).

"We have team targets, but then they're sort of split up. Within my team... we band together, basically. But the bottom line is that you are looked at individually, you know, you have to be otherwise the Partners can't assess your performance." [Solicitor E]

One of the most striking similarities in the narratives of participants within and across all three occupations is the way they secure access to managers and colleagues when seeking support, advice or instruction in their work. These participants are unable to rely on their employer to facilitate these interactions for them because they are operating within a system of work where individuals

schedule and manage their tasks independently of one another, which inhibits institutional organisation of collective activities (Southerton and Tomlinson, 2005). Where there is no (or little) collective ownership of work tasks, the onus is on the individual to 'create' opportunities for collective working by actively seeking out colleagues (or managers) to ask for their input. The ease with which these opportunities can be created depends on the personal relationships between colleagues, and is further complicated when employees and managers are encumbered with a heavy workload. Given responsibility for managing their own work, time becomes something individuals 'take from' or 'gift to' each other. Rather than collectively working 'on their employer's time', participants are either working on their own or each other's time (Thompson, 1967).

For some participants this is easily managed, and they describe themselves as having good working relationships with their colleagues to their mutual benefit and support. Others find it more difficult, especially when they are trying to create relationships with new or 'difficult' colleagues, or have recently moved to a new organisation. These relationships are fragile, require constant maintenance, and can be a source of frustration if one party feels the other is taking advantage of them (e.g. always immediately asking for help, rather than trying to tackle the problem first themselves).

"Everybody's busy, everybody has other priorities, everyone has a list the size of their arm of stuff they need to do... there's not much in it for them to sit there and go through stuff with you because they have their own targets to get to, their own hours to get to, you know, I can see why people are more reluctant. And I think also if you start answering people's questions, you then become the go-to person, and you think 'I don't want that to happen', so you try and avoid it... In [my previous role there was] a trainee in our team, and he liked to chat and ask various questions, and a lot of the time I'd think 'you haven't actually thought about this', and I'd get really annoyed because I'd think 'well, you could have worked that out yourself, but you didn't'. But then I think it probably is quite nice to have some reassurance sometimes, so I get why he was doing it, but when you have your own stuff to do and somebody is taking up your time, sometimes you feel that you can't be bothered with that. Some people are better at it than others I think, some people have all the time in the world for people and are really generous and happy to sit down and go through stuff, really helpful. Other people are good at it sometimes and not at other times, depending on how much they've got on. I think I probably fall into that category more. If I'm really busy, I'm not good, but if I've got time I will sit there and do it. But there are other people who just don't want to know." [Solicitor J]

The creation of these opportunities for collective working is made more difficult by mechanisms of assessment that reward individual performance. Not only do these mechanisms undermine the conditions of trust that underpin the personal relationships that facilitate this give and take of work time (see chapter five), but they also create an environment in which colleagues only benefit from giving co-workers advice and support if their assistance is returned (i.e. they are not rewarded for the act of giving time and help; they only benefit when they receive time and help in return). One of the problems with this is that it can lead individuals to view helping others as a hindrance to their own work, and to attach a higher value to their own time than to that of their colleagues (Perlow, 1999). In her study of engineers, Perlow (1999: 70-71) argued that “by rewarding individual heroics... managers promoted a way of interacting that devalued helping and promoted interruptions; engineers striving to succeed were encouraged to do whatever it took *to get their own job done*” [emphasis added]. Access to and support from colleagues is central to managing the uncertainty and unpredictability that is integral to all three occupations (see chapters four and five), yet the conditions in which participants operate often inhibit institutional organisation of collective working practices. Instead it is participants themselves who are responsible for creating the time and conditions through which this access can be secured. The creation of these opportunities for collective working relies on the establishment and maintenance of the personal relationships that facilitate the gifting of time from one individual to another. For all three groups of participants, access to the support and advice of their colleagues is an on-going negotiation rather than an entitlement upon which they can rely.

Multi-tasking

Trying to complete a number of tasks at once can leave employees feeling pressured, even if the workload itself does not increase (Southerton and Tomlinson, 2005). Participants in all three occupations perform multiple tasks simultaneously, not only in terms of performing a number of tasks at the same time (e.g. taking a phone call from one client while working on the case of another; overseeing detention while preparing for the next lesson) but also in terms of picking up and putting down half-completed tasks in response to changing circumstances (e.g. stopping work halfway through one news story in order to report on another breaking news story) and moving between multiple cases, classes or stories during the course of the day (e.g. at any one time a solicitor’s caseload will comprise of a number of different cases; on any one day a teacher will be teaching a number of

different groups of pupils). Participants' management of this multiplicity of tasks is constrained by two features of their working conditions: the first is that, despite having the 'freedom' to manage their own time, participants' flexibility in organising their tasks is limited by the allocation and timetable for their work and the structure of the working day, conditions that are chiefly imposed by their employer or senior managers; the second is that they are expected to respond to events or urgent problems 'as they arise', which requires the constant reallocation of time and tasks (e.g. the task the participant planned to complete in the morning is pushed back to the afternoon or the following day in order to deal with an immediate crisis)²³.

"Last week when a little baby was killed in a suspected dog incident I had a whole load of meetings and interviews lined up but, even though those meetings were due to result in quite a big story which was meant to happen at the weekend, my editor just went 'just scrap that, just scrap that, and go and do this instead'. So you're at the mercy sometimes of quite, not short-term thinking in the sense of they just don't want the other thing, but there's an expectation of very quickly just changing your plans, dropping everything and making something happen for the following day... which is exciting, but can also be frustrating." [Journalist G]

Participants across all three occupations describe deadlines as playing a particularly important role in structuring their work. Chapter four described how participants' high degree of operational autonomy is regulated by the strategic direction imposed by their employer. This specification of objectives and timescales sees employers use organisational mechanisms like deadlines to create a high level of work intensity. Participants are able to control their work in the run up to the deadline, but meeting the deadline itself is non-negotiable. While these deadlines can be negotiated (between the participants and their clients or participants and their managers) rather than simply imposed, participants' influence over these decisions is mediated by the unequal power relationship that exists between the party paying for the work (e.g. the client or employer) and the party performing the work (themselves as the employee).

In structuring participants' work, deadlines operate as a "vehicle for control", both for the consumers of the work product, who use them to exercise control over the timetable specifying the delivery of their product or service, and for the employers who use them to exert pressure on employees to limit the time available to them for

²³ An exception to this is freelance journalists, but even these participants are not exempt from the deadlines or meetings scheduled by the clients to whom they are contracted.

the completion of a particular task, and failing to meet deadlines is a highly visible indicator of poor performance (Perlow, 1998; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2004: 430). Alvesson and Kärreman (2004: 430) argue that in 'knowledge' occupations, where output is the primary indicator for performance assessment, delivering work on time is "almost a sacred ideal", and one of the reasons so many employees comply with the demands these kinds of jobs make of their time and effort. This 'autonomy paradox' helps to explain why employees with a high degree of operational autonomy focus on completing their work and demonstrating organisational and professional commitment rather than questioning whether what is being asked of them is fair, either in terms of the amount they are being paid or the incursion of work into their leisure time (van Echtelt et al, 2006).

As well as regulating their workload, another consequence of the imposition of deadlines and timetables onto participants' working days is that tasks are necessarily completed when time allows, rather than being organised according to the demands of the task (i.e. 'I have a few minutes, so I will check my emails'; 'I don't have time during the day to prepare my lessons, so I will do that at home'; 'I have meetings all day, so I will think about this problem this evening'). Despite ostensibly having the freedom to manage their own tasks, the specification of the time in which they are expected to complete their work tasks and the structure of the working day (e.g. meetings, classes) limits the degree to which participants can take advantage of this flexibility, and means that rather than completing tasks sequentially or according to a timetable they have devised themselves, participants are often tackling multiple tasks simultaneously, or fitting their tasks into particular slots of time as these become available. This is not to say that participants have no control over the timetabling of their work; they have a great deal, particularly in the day-to-day organisation of their tasks. But the impact of this discretion on the intensity of their work effort is limited both by the structural constraints of their organisation (e.g. office hours) and by the administrative mechanisms (e.g. deadlines) employers use to manage their performance. These constraints make their management of their work more rather than less difficult, and the subsequent erosion of boundaries between tasks can lead participants to feel under pressure as they seek to complete the entirety of their work (Southerton and Tomlinson, 2005).

In addition to the organisational features that structure their working days, weeks and months, participants across all three occupations are also expected to respond to unplanned events as these arise (e.g. to respond immediately to queries from

clients; to deal immediately with a complaint from a parent; to drop one news story in order to work on another). This unpredictability is, in part, due to the nature of the job (see chapter four), but the speed with which participants are expected to respond to these unplanned events is determined by the expectations of their employer and the consumers of their services (and in many cases the participants themselves) as to what constitutes good customer service and/or what clients, parents, or their audience want or expect, which in most cases is an immediate response. Expectation of this demand is facilitated by the development of digital technologies (e.g. smart phones, web-editing software), which enable information to be delivered, accessed and acted upon almost instantly (Wajcman, 2008; Saltzis, 2012). In her study of engineers Perlow (1999) observed that constantly having to respond to 'urgent' tasks as they arise means that employees are increasingly forced to take time away from their planned work until eventually, as the deadline looms, that too becomes 'urgent'. Perlow (1999: 65) calls this the "crisis mentality" and it is a feature common to many participants' narratives, either because the time allocated to the task is insufficient at the outset (e.g. legal-aid solicitors giving legal advice to clients they have never met five minutes ahead of their hearing, or during their police interview), or because they are constantly interrupted by unexpected events (e.g. the need to respond to a client query) or developments (e.g. new information in a news story) that require their immediate attention. Many participants enjoy this way of working, finding it invigorating and varied. However, it can also be stressful and exhausting, particularly when participants are struggling to manage their workload in order to meet upcoming deadlines.

"The difficulty with being a lawyer in a firm is that your time is never your own. Technically, you have the authority to organise your own working day (in that nobody will tell you 'you must do this, then that, then this'), but in reality your work is heavily structured by deadlines over which you have no control – whether they're deadlines set by clients, or, more usually, deadlines set by courts and litigation proceedings. So you technically have control over your time, but really you just have to do the most pressing thing first. Sometimes these deadlines are a bit more flexible (this month, for example, I don't have any pressing deadlines, my first deadline is at the end of the month), so you have a bit more freedom, but it is still governed by deadlines set by other people – that's just the nature of the business." [Solicitor L]

These features demonstrate how journalists', teachers' and solicitors' responsibility for, and control over, their work time repeatedly comes into conflict with their employers' continued control over the allocation of tasks and the structure of the working day. The tension between the two illustrates the complex nature of the

employment relationships that characterise all three of these occupations. Participants have a great deal of control over the organisation of tasks, but have much less control over the allocation of their time, particularly the time they spend 'at work' (i.e. in the office, in school).

Unfinished business

Their employers exert a certain amount of control over participants' time by controlling their workload and specifying the outputs they are expected to achieve, but the degree of effort participants put into their work (i.e. the number of extra hours they work, the intensity at which they work) is materially down to them. They are responsible for ensuring tasks are completed, however long it may take, but are also, in some instances, able to minimise the unnecessary activities they consider superfluous to their work commitment.

All participants, across all three occupations, describe experiencing what Lindqvist and Nordänger (2006: 631) call "a sense of unfinished business" about their work. Participants attribute this feeling to two things: the first is the large amount of work and number of tasks they are expected to perform, which means that there is always something else to do; the second is to do with the nature of the work, its uncertain and unpredictable nature, and the interpretative work required to make the decisions necessary to progress their tasks. As a result, their "work feels infinite" (Burkeman, 2016) because there is always something to do or something to think about, but nobody to tell them when to stop. Even when participants are not actively engaged in work tasks (whether at the office or school, or at home), thoughts of work can intrude into the rest of their life. Rather than being bounded by time, these task-orientated jobs are imbued with a sense of "timelessness" (Bunting, 2005: 16).

Being absorbed in work outside work time is not always a negative experience, particularly when it concerns a task participants find enjoyable or intellectually challenging. Lindqvist and Nordänger (2006) describe these kinds of work-related thoughts as 'companions', engaging and maintaining participants' interest in their work and stimulating their creativity. On the other hand, their work also causes participants to dwell endlessly on intractable problems, fuelled by the "gnawing anxiety [that] emanates from the agony of constantly having to choose" how to proceed (Lindqvist and Nordänger, 2006: 634). One offers a kind of intellectual and creative freedom, the other shackles participants to their jobs. The task-based

nature of their obligations to their employer, combined with the limitless possibilities for their work, means that it is the participants themselves who have to reinstate the boundaries of their job. The only alternative is to carry on working indefinitely.

Different participants have different ways of coping with, and seeking to limit, the demands their work makes on their time. Their choices are informed by their interpretation of their work commitments, the necessity of performing various work tasks, the relative importance of some tasks as compared with others, and the value participants attach to different aspects of their job. As in so much of their work, participants' interpretation of the most appropriate use of their time is mediated by their employers' valuation of different tasks, as well as their own views on the purpose of their role.

"It's quite hard for you to say 'actually, I'm not being paid for this, I'm going to work the hours I consider to be reasonable'. I never leave the office at 5.30pm, and I'm always in early, but I think it's getting to a stage where you think 'I can't do anymore, I'm going home, I need some food, I need to chill out for a bit, and then maybe I'll go back to it or pick it up again in the morning'. It's very hard when you have a Blackberry that is constantly going off... I think it was last week I worked quite late on Wednesday night because I wanted to finish on time on Thursday and I left the office at 8.30pm and thought 'I'm not going to look at my Blackberry now, enough is enough, I'm going to go home and relax'. And it went off a few times, but I just ignored it. Then I got into the office the next day and I had twelve unread emails... I'm not going to [work over my holiday]. I think if you set a precedent for it...there are some people who do... I may take my Blackberry and check it, but I'm not going to actively respond unless I absolutely have to, because you have to draw the line somewhere." [Solicitor J]

"It is a lot of work, I guess it's a question of prioritising what needs to be done, what, if I leave it, isn't as important to making sure the students are achieving what they're supposed to be achieving. So yeah, there's a lot of work, reasonably long hours, reasonably stressful, but I do insist on planning a bit of a work-life balance, so I do make sure I'm not spending all hours of the day at work, and that I'm working as efficiently as possible. Like I said before, I'm focused on being pragmatic: 'what do I need to do to make sure this happens?'. And if there's a task that appears to be a task but isn't really advancing what I'm trying to achieve then I won't do it or I'll delegate it." [Teacher C]

Participants who attributed their workload to forces out of their control (e.g. their employer) tended to impose fewer limits on their work effort than those who viewed their workload as something to be negotiated rather than complied with. The latter sought to achieve what they considered to be a reasonable balance between the volume of work desired by their employer (which, if it was not infinite, then at the very least exceeded what they could reasonably deliver) and the volume of work

they could achieve within the time they were able to allocate to their work. These participants still worked extended and/or intense hours, but they were more likely to express ownership of these decisions, and consequently to describe their workload as excessive, but manageable. This distinction in the perceived status of their workload (i.e. as negotiable or non-negotiable) was replicated across all three occupations.

Blurred boundaries of skill

The complexity or apparent straightforwardness of a job [are] favourite indices of its importance or degree of responsibility. To say that a particular job is complex is to praise it; and to call it routine, a term of disparagement. The difficulty is to signify what is meant. Whether a task is complex or routine is often a matter on which competent judges may well disagree. And to the person unfamiliar with a job's requirements, what seems merely routine may be a much more complex task concealed under apparent ease of performance.

E. Jaques, 1956: 8

One of the most striking features of all participants' narratives is the breadth of their activities, many of which do not fit comfortably into categories of high or low skill. The tasks participants perform in addition to the primary tasks of giving legal advice, instructing pupils and creating news stories (e.g. marketing, administration) are a combination of the kinds of activities you might associate with both more senior and more junior roles (e.g. pitching to clients, producing and editing content, taking responsibility for a particular Key Stage curriculum vs. billing clients, uploading content to a website, inputting pupil data). A number of participants in all three occupations noted that there had been redundancies and cutbacks within their sector, resulting in tasks that had previously been performed by other colleagues being incorporated into their jobs, but this was not true in every case. These findings raise questions as to how accurate and useful categories of high and low skill are in describing and understanding the nature and demands of these kinds of jobs.

Gallie et al (1998: 28) observe that "concerns about trends in skill derive in great part from the fact that skill levels are seen as determining much of the employees' experience of the work task, and hence the quality of their work life". Where some authors argue that many jobs that previously required highly-educated workers (like solicitors, teachers and journalists) are being 'de-skilled' by new technologies or management practices (Braverman, 1974; Mather et al, 2012), others note that the

employees themselves often believe these developments to facilitate 'up-skilling' as they take on more responsibility for their work (Wallace, 2013). A further limitation of the de-skilling thesis is that it relies on the erroneous assertion that increases in the intensity of work induced by new ways of working necessarily degrade employees' responsibility for, and control over, their work tasks (Ackroyd and Bolton, 1999; Carter and Stevenson, 2012). The problem with the polarisation of this debate is that neither position can account for the multiplicity and varied nature of the tasks that comprise the jobs of the journalists, teachers and solicitors discussed here. Within this framework of analysis, which operates on the understanding that jobs exist on a spectrum from 'high' to low' skilled roles, individual jobs (or employees) can be en-skilled or de-skilled, but rarely both. Even the term 'multi-skilled' (e.g. Wallace, 2013) fails to fully capture the complexity of participants' experience, in that it describes the variety in their jobs, but not the combination of more and less skilled tasks.

Furthermore, the composition of their role (i.e. the precise combination of participants' tasks) and the conditions under which these are being performed is central to understanding the demands jobs make of the people performing them. Analyses of tasks, or of employees' experience of performing tasks, only provide a partial representation of the job as a whole²⁴. It is the combination of participants' tasks as they are performed within a particular work context that provides the most comprehensive picture of the demands of their job. For example, solicitors perform a number of administrative and promotional tasks ancillary to their legal advice, including providing clients with quotes for their work and attending networking events to secure new business. Understanding the nature of these tasks requires analysis of the features of these tasks *within this particular role*; the tasks on their own do not provide enough information. Neither is inferring the nature and content of these tasks from similar tasks performed by other people (e.g. a secretary; a Partner) a reliable indicator of the nature of the task as it is performed by a salaried solicitor. Giving a client a quote for their work by referring to a fixed price list is completely different to estimating how much the work might cost according to criteria that is context-dependent, flexible and liable to change as a case progresses. A good example of this is the journalists' task of arranging an interview. Arranging an interview is primarily an administrative task, in that it is about setting up a time for

²⁴ The functional skills analysis that is used to develop the National Occupational Standards which specify standards of performance for carrying out particular functions is a good example of this (e.g. UKCES, 2011).

an interview to take place. However, in the context of a journalists' role, arranging interviews is often more complex than this, requiring journalists to negotiate access to the interviewee before they can even begin to discuss times and dates.

"The way we interact with people is heavily contingent on the circumstances. Going through PR companies, the press officers or whatever and trying to speak to a real person is normally banging your head against a brick wall, so the approach there can vary between softly, softly, nicey, nicey to not so nice 'we're running this – give me a comment or we're running it anyway'... [On the other hand] there's the almost social worker aspect of caring for a vulnerable source. I have one source at the moment who is taking a hell of a lot of risk speaking to me [so] I've spent a lot of time comforting, reassuring, offering to give them different phone numbers, offering to give them a different email address, offering to go and visit them somewhere else, things like that, to make them feel comfortable." [Journalist G]

Aggregating these features (i.e. estimating that some de-skilling is off-set by some up-skilling, which, in sum, leads to little overall change in the overall level of skill required) is equally unhelpful if the purpose of classifying jobs as being of a particular level of skill is to understand the composition of tasks and the demands these jobs make of the people performing them, and to use this to assess the quality of their work life. Green (2012) makes a similar point in his evaluation of the techniques used to estimate how many tasks could be performed by computers instead of humans, noting that any close analysis of individual tasks indicates that although the identification of non-routine tasks is fairly straightforward, it is extremely difficult to identify and accurately label routine tasks without having access to information on the context in which they are being performed.

While the intensity of their work does not equate to a reduction in the level of skill and discretion required to perform their tasks, participants' descriptions of their work time indicate that a greater variety and number of tasks may contribute to the reduced porosity of their working day (Green, 2001). With the range of their activities, and their participation in multiple stages of the production of the work product (e.g. journalists not only find, research and compile news stories, but also edit, upload and publish them), participants' descriptions of the structure of their work have more in common with the 17th or 18th century craftsmen (asynchronous and flexible hours of work; primary tasks interspersed with ancillary activities) than to the 19th or 20th century factory worker who repeatedly performed the same isolated component of a task for a fixed period of time (Thompson, 1967; Sennett, 2009). There is never a dull moment in these jobs because there is always

something to do. Gaps in the day that might provide respite from the work of giving legal advice, instructing pupils or writing news stories are instead filled with billing, filing, photocopying and uploading data. For some participants (particularly teachers and solicitors), the demands made on their time during the working day means their paid work regularly spills over into their rest of their life.

Blurred boundaries between work and life

In 1930 John Maynard Keynes predicted that in the years to come one of the biggest problems society would face would be “how to occupy the leisure, which science and compound interest will have won... to live wisely and agreeably and well” (Keynes, 1972 [1930]: 328). In fact, the experiences of the journalists, solicitors and teachers detailed here indicate that the activities they perform as part of their paid employment take up more rather than less of their lives. The incursion of work into other areas of life, whether through working extra hours or in musing on work problems over the weekend, inevitably has implications for leisure, home and family life. It also both has implications for, and is a consequence of, the way participants themselves view their jobs.

E.P. Thompson (1967: 60) observed that “a community in which task-orientation [to work time] is common appears to show least demarcation between ‘work’ and ‘life’”. This erosion of any kind of fixed boundary between paid work and the rest of life informs employees’ experience of work itself, and also the role work plays in their lives. The need to take work home and to be available to respond to colleagues and clients during leisure time (e.g. to emails, queries) can mean that, rather than providing a break from work, time outside contracted hours is spent recovering from, preparing for and worrying about work tasks (Beynon et al, 2002). As paid work colonises other areas of life it erodes the leisure time that could be spent enjoying other, more fulfilling activities (Bunting, 2005; Frayne, 2015). However, some participants find the work activities they perform in their ‘own’ time rewarding, either because they have chosen to allocate additional time to the tasks they find most interesting (e.g. devising lesson plans; coming up with new ideas for activities or stories; keeping up with the latest developments in their area of interest), or because the problems they find themselves contemplating are interesting puzzles. This is consistent with findings from a number of employment surveys which found that working long hours is not inimical to finding satisfaction in work (Taylor, 2002;

Worrall et al, 2016). Taylor (2002), for example, noted that 49 per cent of the respondents to the Working in Britain Survey who worked more than their contracted hours did so, at least in part, because they found their job interesting.

Lewis (2003: 344) argues that while “work is often defined in terms of obligated time, whether paid or unpaid... the nature of paid work has changed for many people, particularly those engaged in knowledge work. Work is increasingly enjoyable and seductive and the boundaries between work and leisure are often blurred”. This appears to be the case for many journalists, teachers and solicitors, who made clear that they derive a great deal of satisfaction and enjoyment from their work (whether due to the intellectual or creative challenges their work supplies, or to the intrinsic rewards of the work e.g. the satisfaction they received from completing a deal, helping a pupil, or publishing a good story) even while they struggle with the environment in which they are operating (e.g. the expectations, management practices, intensity of work). One of the biggest challenges researchers face in understanding these kinds of jobs is that it can be difficult to disentangle the enjoyment participants get from their work, some of which can come from the exhilaration of the pace and intensity at which they perform their activities, and the degree to which their high work effort is a choice they have made for themselves rather than due to “a sense of obligation or constrained choice of sources of self-esteem” (Lewis, 2003: 353). Participants’ descriptions of their choices and obligations regarding work effort, and the way these are shaped by contemporary employment and labour market conditions, will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Participants in all three occupations perform a large number of different activities, many of which are not directly related to what might be considered their ‘primary’ roles of finding news stories, instructing pupils or giving legal advice. A number of authors have argued that employees performing the kinds of roles explored in this thesis risk becoming ‘de-skilled’ as their jobs are broken down into their constituent parts and individual tasks are hived off to be performed by other, less well-paid employees. The degree to which this is possible and/or likely is a matter of huge public and academic debate, particularly with regard to the role new ways of working (e.g. digital technologies) will play in reshaping these kinds of jobs. Yet whatever the

future may hold, this characterisation is not an accurate depiction of these roles as they currently are. Far from performing half a job, these journalists, teachers and solicitors are performing one and a half jobs. However, the discretion that comes with this increased responsibility is moderated by the task-based orientation of their employment relationship and the mechanisms by which their employers allocate and organise their work. These inhibit the collective working practices that mitigate the uncertain and unpredictable nature of their work tasks and make participants themselves responsible both for creating time in which to complete their work and for (re)-drawing the boundaries between their work and home lives. The demands these responsibilities make of participants, and the degree to which their expectations of, and ambitions for, their work and careers inform their individual choices, are the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 7

The demands of non-standard, discretionary work

This chapter draws together the findings described in the previous three chapters to consider their implications for understanding the demands of graduates' work. The chapter begins by summarising the key features and conditions of participants' work before going on to examine participants' perceptions of the labour market, careers and paid employment in order to clarify the environment in which they are negotiating some of these challenges. It then discusses the demands performing this kind of work under these conditions makes of the individuals who occupy these jobs, considering the implications of these findings for understanding of graduates' work and the skills-based conception of work upon which existing conceptions of the relationship between higher education and employment are based.

The nature and conditions of participants' work

The previous three chapters identified a number of features and conditions of work common to all three occupations. Chapter four discussed the unpredictable and uncertain nature of participants' tasks, observing the imprecise and incomplete specification of their objectives, and the variable nature of the work process. It concluded that much of the decision-making required to execute participants' tasks is interpretative and has to be performed 'on the job', and that it is dependent on a combination of unpredictable factors (e.g. events, people) that generate a range of choices for which there is no one fixed or correct answer. As a result, the end product of participants' work is inextricably linked to the decisions they and others take during the course of its production. The interpretative space between their employers' organisational objectives and the means and outcome of their work means that participants' own values, understanding of, and ambitions for their work informs their interpretation of this guidance. However, when exercising their discretion, participants' decisions are informed, and their values mediated, by the organisational and social conditions in which they are operating.

Chapter five considered these organisational and social conditions in greater detail, examining how participants' performance is regulated and assessed. It noted that

the practices through which participants are held to account are concerned primarily with the outcome rather than the performance of their work. While managers retain control over the more significant strategic decisions, it is participants themselves who are responsible for the day-to-day operational decision-making that determines the precise outcome of their work. If participants require additional advice or support, they identify the need for and negotiate access to this assistance themselves. As a result, organisational control over participants' practice is what Sennett (1998: 57) describes as "strong [but] shapeless", influencing their performance by determining the objectives of their work and the criteria for its assessment, while simultaneously bequeathing responsibility for identifying the means by which these objectives are achieved and this criteria met to participants themselves. This responsibility includes reconciling the interests of all the individuals and groups who have a stake in their work. This multiplicity of obligations is best described as a "web of commitments" (Solbrekke, 2008), which encapsulates the complexity of these entangled relationships and the extent to which participants, at the centre of the web, are responsible for resolving the tensions between them. The precise nature of their commitments is unique to each participant because the different interests of these groups are influenced by a multitude of factors whose precise composition is determined by the particular context in which the work is being performed. These organisational conditions are a mixed blessing for participants' operational autonomy, in that they expand as well as limit the parts of their work over which participants have some control. Performance management mechanisms that prioritise outcomes over practice create space for participants to perform their work as they see fit as long as they deliver the expected outcomes, but within a framework of performance indicators and organisational strategies (including the allocation and distribution of tasks) over which they have no control, and which are underpinned by a simplified conception of their work which prioritises and rewards specific components of the outcomes (e.g. exam results; number of hours billed; breaking news stories). The differing priorities (and authority) of the groups to whom participants have obligations limits their strategic freedom but the multiplicity of these groups creates a certain amount of space within which they can choose how to reconcile the tensions between them.

Chapter five then examined the role other people play in shaping participants' performance and experience of their work. It concluded that collaborating with colleagues is central to managing and mitigating the risks associated with the uncertainty and unpredictability of their work, but that these collective working

practices are complicated by mechanisms of performance management and assessment that are underpinned by assumptions of collective accountability (e.g. peer review) yet reward individual achievement (often on the basis of comparisons between colleagues). As a result, competition and collaboration coexist as participants contribute to and assess one another's work while simultaneously competing for the visibility and achievements that will lead to promotions, financial rewards, or new opportunities elsewhere. The tension between participants' individual and collective interests is further exacerbated by their different allegiances within their organisation and to their occupation. Reconciling these tensions (and their differing interpretations of organisational issues and occupational priorities) is essential to the establishment and maintenance of participants' working relationships, and consequently to the performance of their work. The interactive nature of their work, and the negotiation and discussion required to resolve and manage its uncertainty and unpredictability, means that the personalities and dispositions of individual colleagues, managers and consumers play an important role in shaping participants' performance (and experience) of their tasks and job. Understanding and responding to this variability is central to participants' performance of their work, and to their ability to operate across, and move between, organisations.

Chapter six considered participants' experience of organising their work, including the composition of their jobs, and the relationship between their work tasks and work time. It found that participants in all three occupations perform a large number of different activities, many of which are not directly connected to their 'primary' roles of finding new stories, instructing pupils in a particular subject or giving legal advice. Participants' ancillary tasks comprise a combination of activities commonly associated both with more senior (i.e. more or higher skilled) and with more junior (i.e. less or lower skilled) roles, which facilitates their participation in multiple aspects and stages of the work process. The number and range of their tasks means that, for many participants, there is little respite from work during the day as their activities expand to fill the time available. Equally, the task-orientated nature of their employment relationships means that participants are responsible for making and managing time to complete their tasks, with many working into the evenings, taking work home at weekends, or thinking about work problems during what is ostensibly leisure time. These time pressures present differently within and across occupations depending on the structure of the work, but the general picture across all three occupations is one of intensive and extensive work effort due to the pace

and quantity of work and the length and elasticity of the working day. In part, this is due to the structure of their work, which sees participants across all three occupations perform multiple tasks simultaneously, picking up and putting down tasks in response to changing circumstances and moving between different activities during the course of the day. Individual participants usually 'own' and organise their own work, scheduling and managing their tasks independently of one another. The unpredictable and increasingly consumer-led nature of their work means that they also respond to events or urgent problems as these arise, requiring them to constantly reallocate their time and tasks as circumstances change. However, participants' responsibility for, and control over, their work time repeatedly comes into conflict with their employer's (and consumer's) continued control over the allocation of and timetable for their work (e.g. deadlines), and the structure of the working day. This assigns to participants the responsibility both for creating time in which to complete their work and for (re)-drawing the boundaries between their work and home lives, but inhibits the collective working practices that mitigate uncertainty in their work (i.e. time becomes something colleagues 'take from' or 'gift to' each other, which means the ease with which participants can access support depends on their personal relationships with colleagues and managers, and on the time these individuals have to give).

The above synopsis has concentrated on the points of similarity between participants' accounts of their work, which indicates a consistency of experience within and across all three occupations with regard to the nature and conditions of their work and the challenges these pose. Yet despite these similarities, all three chapters also report significant variation in participants' narratives (within as well as across occupations) in the composition of their jobs, their preferences for particular managerial styles, organisational conditions, and clients, pupils or audiences, the features of work that most inspire or dispirit them, and participants' own ambitions for their work and interpretations of the purpose of their role. In examining the interpretative space between the specification and enactment of organisational objectives, chapter four examined what participants considered to be the 'ideal' journalist, teacher or solicitor, finding considerable variation within occupational groups in participants' interpretation of shared occupational values and their personal priorities and preferred practices. Chapter five similarly discussed how the sense of collective occupational identity (i.e. as journalists, teachers or solicitors) created through shared occupational values could also be a site of conflict when colleagues disagree as to the interpretation of these values as they apply to a

particular situation, especially the way individuals sought to reconcile their occupational values with the priorities and practices of their employer. It also observed that participants' own views were fluid rather than fixed, (re)-interpreting their values as they applied them to particular issues or in different circumstances. Finally, chapter six noted that different participants also had different ways of coping with, and seeking to limit, the demands their work made of their time and effort, which were informed by their interpretation of work commitments, the necessity of performing certain work tasks, the relative importance (and their enjoyment) of some tasks as compared with others, and the value they attached to different aspects of their job.

The heterogeneity of participants' personal and occupational values, preferred ways of working and expectations of and ambitions for their work, and of individual participants' performance of work tasks, understanding of the boundaries of their work, and interpretation and achievement of organisational (and personal) objectives is significant not because one particular combination of preferences and ambitions is particularly 'successful', but because it demonstrates how varied graduates' experience and performance of these kinds of operationally discretionary work can be. It also suggests that participants' conceptions and experiences of, and ambitions for, work play an important role in facilitating the performance of their work, not only because they provide a foundation for participants' interpretation and achievement of organisational objectives and outcomes, but also because they motivate participants' work effort and enable individuals to identify the circumstances and practices with which they are most (or least) comfortable (and consequently consider themselves most or least productive).

The next section examines participants' perceptions and experiences of contemporary labour market and employment conditions and considers the implications of this for their experience and understanding of their employment and work, and the challenges they face in performing their day-to-day work while making provision for their medium-to-long term employment, including advancing their career. While not the primary focus of the research, participants' descriptions of and views on their employment histories, and their expectations and ambitions for the future, indicate that their perception of their employment circumstances informs their interpretation of the web of commitments they must negotiate in the performance of their work.

Uncertainty and insecurity in and of employment

The last twenty years have seen an increase in the number of authors raising concerns about the nature and stability of employment and employment relationships in the UK, with some arguing that jobs and careers are becoming increasingly unpredictable and insecure. One view is that societies in the West are experiencing a period of increased 'individualisation' as individuals take on (or are assigned) greater responsibility for their own biographies or life choices, which means their life courses, social relationships and identities are increasingly "liquid" (i.e. chaotic, divergent, unstable, unfixed) (Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2000; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). These authors argue that these changes are eroding the institutional structures (e.g. bureaucratic) and shared identities (e.g. class) that have, until recently, governed the organisation and practice of social life (including careers), rendering activities like employment increasingly insecure and uncertain. Another view, advanced by authors with a similar premise but more optimistic outlook, is that changing expectations and opportunities in employment, particularly regarding career advancement, are enabling individuals to take greater ownership of their own lives, giving them greater freedom of movement between as well as within organisations, creating opportunities for horizontal as well as vertical career advancement, and enabling individuals to play a bigger role in determining their career goals, outcomes and paths (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 1996; Cappelli, 1999).

Both propositions have come in for a great deal of criticism from sceptics who argue that there is very little empirical data to support these claims, particularly with regard to the predicted increase in job mobility, non-standard patterns of employment and the alleged insecure and/or temporary nature of contemporary employment (Jacoby, 1999a; Jacoby 1999b; Mythen, 2005; Fevre, 2007; Atkinson, 2010; Rodrigues and Guest, 2010). For these critics, theories of increased autonomy and/or insecurity in and of employment are undermined by the endurance of contractual relationships and patterns of employment characterised by stability, rather than fluidity (e.g. full-time, permanent employment). However, the narratives of participants in this study suggest that such an emphatic rejection ignores the incidence of some of the features the authors they criticise identify in their theses (e.g. privatised responsibility), and consequently fails to consider the material and social implications of these as they come into conflict with the more fixed mechanisms of

organising work and employment that (as these critics correctly contend) continue to exist concurrently.

Green (2006: 130-131) describes job insecurity as “the loss of welfare that comes from uncertainty in work [primarily concerning] beliefs around the probability of a future event”. Drawing on British survey data generated in response to the question “do you think there is any chance at all of losing your job and becoming unemployed in the next twelve months?” he observes that there was a decline in the perceived likelihood of job loss between 1986 and 2001, and argues that it is therefore “not accurate to describe work in the modern industrialised world as especially insecure”, and that “to do so would be to hide from memory the experiences of millions of workers in earlier economic crises” (Green, 2006: 147-149). While making an important point about the necessity of considering historical context when making claims about the relative risk of becoming unemployed, participants’ descriptions of their own employment experience suggests that this particular conception of insecurity (i.e. the short-to-medium term risk of job loss) does not fully capture the insecure and uncertain nature of contemporary work as it is experienced by those in and/or seeking employment. The term ‘precarious work’ is commonly used to describe “working situations that lack predictability and security and seem to mean increased vulnerability for workers” (Hewison, 2016: 430). Consequently, it is primarily associated with non-standard employment (e.g. temporary, low-paid and/or part-time work, fixed-term or zero-hours contracts and self-employment) amid concerns over material insecurity associated with insecure and low-waged work²⁵.

Yet focusing solely on absolute job security within a particular role neglects the other kinds of insecurity and uncertainty experienced by employees as they seek to maintain their employment or progress their career. More recent data from the 2012 Skills and Employment Survey indicates that there was a sharp increase in fear of job loss between 2006 and 2012, particularly after the 2008-09 recession, but also, and perhaps more significantly for the purposes of this discussion, that “fear of employment loss in 2012 was higher than in any previous period captured by our surveys, including 1986 when unemployment rates were very much higher” (Gallie et al, 2013: section 5). Apart from the six freelance journalists, all the participants in this study were employed on permanent, full-time contracts. Few anticipated the

²⁵ In the 2016 edition of the Sage Handbook of the Sociology of Work and Employment, for example, chapters on ‘precarious work’ and ‘employment uncertainty and risk’ are included in a section entitled ‘non-standard forms of work and employment’ (Edgell et al, 2016).

imminent loss of their current job, but many had lost colleagues through redundancy and made reference to the precarious nature of employment more generally. Their descriptions of their work histories and plans for the future indicated that most regarded jobs to be impermanent (in that they did not expect to remain in the same position for a long time, regardless of the nature of their employment contract) and their long-term prospects unknowable given their uncertainty over the maintenance and advancement of their employment in the medium-to-long term. All of which suggests that measures which focus on the (perceived) risks of *unemployment* are inadequate for the purposes of assessing insecurities *within* employment, particularly those concerned with maintaining a particular standard of employment and facilitating career progression, both of which are equally important with regard to the role they play in shaping individuals' work priorities and experiences (Bunting, 2005; Tweedie, 2013)

Participants made a number of observations about their employment circumstances, the most common of which were: that their current working conditions were unsustainable; that they were unsure about opportunities for advancement and their plans for the future; and that they were concerned about the risks of 'staying still' for too long. A number of participants in all three occupations explicitly questioned whether they could sustain a career in teaching, law or journalism until they retired given the demands these jobs make of their time and energy. This uncertainty regarding the maintenance and advancement of their employment over the course of their career was echoed by the large number of participants who were unsure as to what they wanted to achieve, what they might do next, where they would go, or how they would get there. Some were more troubled by this uncertainty than others, but few had a long-term view as to where they might end up, preferring instead to 'see how things go' as they went along. Sennett (1998: 84-85) argues that employees seeking advancement in modern organisations necessarily "dwell in ambiguity and uncertainty" because the sites for opportunity are not fixed, they are "holes" in the organisational network that expand and contract as circumstances change, meaning it is incumbent upon the individual to create and take advantage of these opportunities when and where they can. Participants' narratives indicate that their experience of career advancement is broadly consistent with this description, in that their work histories are presented as a series of decisions taken in response to the circumstances or opportunities that arose during the course of their career (Bosley et al, 2009). Taking advantage of such opportunities is inherently risky because there is uncertainty around the outcomes. Many of the choices participants

make in an effort to progress their careers are speculative, taking on (or creating) additional roles, responsibilities, or activities in the hope rather than the knowledge that their investment will be rewarded further down the line (e.g. with pay increases, or more interesting or senior roles).

Most participants had already held a number of jobs and worked for more than one employer when they came to be interviewed for this study. When describing how they came to be in their current role, participants in all three occupations cited the need to gain more and/or different experiences (or skills or knowledge) as one of the main reasons they have moved between, or intended to look for, other roles with different organisations. A common theme across many participants' narratives was the assumption that they would 'move on' when they had 'achieved all they could' in their current role (whether internally or to another organisation). Despite being employed in permanent roles, these participants experienced their employment as open-ended but temporary. Participants' concern for, and pursuit of, movement and change in their employment, and their association of personal fulfilment and career success with the achievement of new or different things, whether roles or experiences, means that even where participants have a clear idea as to where and how they want to proceed in their career, they are keen to maintain the number and range of options available to them, both within and across not only organisations but also occupations and industries. Freidson (2001: 77-78) contends that the conflict between the organisation-specific nature of jobs and the need for employees to maintain access to all jobs "increases rather than decreases the importance of occupation as a source of horizontal inter-firm careers in the labour market [as] occupational titles and occupation become even more essential market signals". In fact, participants perceive their employment landscape to be even wider than this, extending beyond the boundaries of their occupation as well as beyond the walls of their current organisation.

Participants' career ambitions combine features associated with both vertical and career development, in that they seek both career advancement (i.e. increased status, pay and rewards) and career achievement (i.e. interesting and rewarding work, increased expertise, participation in a broad range of activities) (Zabusky and Barley, 1996). These dual (often duelling) aspirations inform their assessment of the roles into which they might be expected to progress, leading some participants to question or even reject the prescribed paths through which they might be expected to secure career advancement within their particular occupation or organisation (e.g.

solicitor to senior solicitor to Partner; teacher to head of department to associate head teacher) if they feel these outcomes will fail to satisfy their personal and professional ambitions. There is also a feeling, particularly amongst solicitors, that the limited number of senior roles compared to the large number of applicants means that these outcomes are unattainable for the majority of employees, which means pursuing these paths is as much of a risk as not pursuing them, particularly if competing for these roles means sacrificing other opportunities for personal fulfilment (e.g. rewarding work; work-life balance).

The weight individual preferences are given with regard to their influence over career goals and strategies is all the more striking given that both teaching and law offer relatively clear occupational routes for vertical progression within and across organisations. It is not that participants' perceptions of the legitimacy and value of personal goals are not informed by broader collective expectations and attitudes towards different kinds of work. Many commercial solicitors, for example, cited the pay and status associated with law as one of the reasons they entered and/or would continue to practice in the field. Teachers, on the other hand, often cited their comparative lack of status (relative to other professional occupations) as a source of dissatisfaction. What their narratives suggest is that participants feel it is incumbent upon them to identify and navigate their own career paths on the basis of their personal ambitions and preferences, drawing upon a range of influences in the process.

The reliance on, and perceived authority of, personal ambitions and individual preferences in the identification of goals and the means of achieving career advancement and achievement means that participants are faced with a seemingly infinite number of possibilities but very little criteria upon which they can rely when considering which path or strategy to follow. Nearly all participants repeatedly made reference to the colleagues upon whom they modelled their behaviour and practice, drawing comparisons between themselves and those colleagues whose careers, activities, approaches, practices or ideas they admired or disagreed with in their descriptions of their work experiences and career ambitions. Bauman (2000: 49-50) contends that "the lot of a free agent is full of antinomies, [not least] the contradiction of self-made identities which must be solid enough to be acknowledged as such and yet flexible enough not to bar freedom of future movements in the constantly changing, volatile circumstances." He argues that uncertainty in this context comes from not knowing the ends, rather than not

knowing the means, which is why individuals operating in these conditions seek examples to which they can aspire in order to identify goals they can pursue. This analysis is consistent with the comments of participants who described colleagues they identified as 'mentors' as central to the development of their personal practice, career ambitions and progression.

Uncertainty over their future prospects may also explain why so many participants were concerned with keeping their options open, as opposed to the pursuit of a specific outcome. As Bauman (2000: 73) observes, "in a world in which the range of ends is too wide for comfort and always wider than that of available means... staying in the race is the most important of means". For most participants then, the main priority was their continued participation and advancement in the kinds of work (e.g. journalism, working with disadvantaged children, working with global businesses) that would supply the kinds of tasks they find most interesting, enjoyable, motivating and stimulating. A number of teachers who enjoyed teaching older or more able students, for example, indicated that they would look to move into further or adult education 'for their next challenge'. Journalists regularly cited sideways moves into public relations, media consultancy or academia as options they could consider in the future, while solicitors would consider moving between fields, in-house, or into lecturing.

One criticism of the theory of insecurity advanced by authors such as Beck and Bauman is that it is manufactured (e.g. by the media or through government policy) rather than a response to, or indication of, any material change in employment or work (e.g. Fevre, 2007), yet, as Tweedie (2013) points out, this is not inconsistent with these theorists' own explanations as to why they believe the social changes they describe are on the increase. To dismiss these insecurities as evidence of "the power of nightmares" (Fevre, 2007: 525) overlooks the role perception and experience of this insecurity (imagined or otherwise) plays in (re)-shaping the way individuals understand and experience employment and their employment relationships, features central to any analyses seeking to understand the demands work makes of the people performing it (Vallas and Prener, 2012). A number of participants, for example, expressed concern over the long-term security of their roles within their industry, particularly journalists whose reflections on the potential threats and opportunities citizen journalism poses to the status and employment of professional reporters echo debates currently taking place in the academic literature (e.g. Witschge and Nygren, 2009; Williams et al, 2011). Teachers and solicitors

made similar references to the risks and opportunities posed by new technologies and the role these may play in re-shaping their occupations. That these debates are likely fuelled by coverage in the media (e.g. McTague, 2014; Meltzer, 2014; Marsh, 2015) does not make their impact any less real for participants themselves.

Focusing only on the material conditions of employment as denoted by employment contracts and bureaucratic mechanisms for organising work (e.g. the endurance of permanent, full-time contracts and organisational and occupational routes for progression) offers a one-sided and consequently misleading depiction of (in)-security and (un)-certainty in and of employment because it overlooks the perceptions (e.g. of responsibilities) and experiences (e.g. of the employment relationship) of those participating in it. Yet it is equally important to acknowledge the role these material conditions play in mediating participants' perceptions and shaping their experiences. Warhurst and Thompson (1998: 19) capture both the fluid and the fixed nature of different aspects of these conditions when they observe, "continuity is as pervasive as change, if for no other reason than because new ideas and practices are by definition built on the legacy of the old". While participants consider themselves both free and compelled to construct their own careers, their autonomy is limited by the bureaucratic structures and institutional gatekeepers that continue to control access to opportunities and jobs within the labour market, and their perceptions as to the value of different kinds of roles and ambitions continue to be shaped by the views of others regarding the status of different kinds of work and its associated rewards.

Bauman (2000: 32) draws a distinction between *de jure* autonomy (autonomy in principle) and *de facto* autonomy (material experience of autonomy) that is helpful in clarifying the challenges participants face. Participants' narratives indicate that they feel able and obligated to take responsibility for their employment circumstances, but that in practice this autonomy is limited by the institutional and social structures of the labour market and the organisations in which they operate. However, it is not enough to say that these participants have autonomy in theory but not practice, because that principle of autonomy informs their material responsibilities, even where their experience of exercising their autonomy is limited. Consequently, participants seek ways of bridging the gap between the assertion of the principle of autonomy regarding their personalised career ambitions and their ability to maintain their employment, and their relative lack of material autonomy regarding their capacity to assert their individuality in employment and to secure access to

employment opportunities. Understanding the interrelationship between these kinds of, what Dawson (2012) describes as, embedded and dis-embedded individualisation (e.g. individualised practices and conditions and the philosophies that facilitate them) is central to understanding the demands participants' work makes of them, both as employees and as individuals seeking to remain employable and in employment.

For participants, uncertainty around modes and means of career advancement are a mixed blessing; their future is unfixed but also unknown. Participants are ostensibly free to plot their own career paths, yet limited by the barriers to employment over which they have little control and burdened by their own expectations (and associated anxieties) as to what they must achieve in order to give meaning and purpose to their work and career (Sennett; 1998; Sanders, 2010). These employment conditions contribute to a perception that work is necessarily an individual rather than a shared or collective experience as career goals and employment experiences are customised according to the values, preferences and choices of individual participants. Yet paradoxically, in order to please themselves, participants are required to maintain their potential to satisfy an ever more varied and larger number of employers, occupations, and consumers. Uncertainty about their future means that it is all the more important to maintain access to a wide range of employment opportunities, and in order to keep their options open participants need to ensure they develop a breadth as well as depth of experience, knowledge and skills because they do not yet know what roles they might apply for, nor which employers they might need to impress or what criteria they might be required to meet. The "covenant" of employability that participants are operating in accordance with (i.e. the assumption that participants can construct their own careers by meeting the needs of the employers they choose to work for) does not "reflect a greater independence for employees or a new balance of power" as much as "a major transfer of risk" (Clarke and Patrickson, 2008: 134). Participants were both fatalistic and optimistic about their situation. In their 1997-1999 analysis of changing employment relationships Beynon et al (2002) found that employees were inclined to resist changes in working time which threatened to increase the intensity and flexibility and extend the length of their working hours. The participants interviewed for this study, on the other hand, while expressing dissatisfaction with the hours and intensity of their work and its incursion into their personal life, accepted these demands as part-and-parcel of their work, observing that they were free to move roles, occupations or organisations if it became too much, or,

alternatively, that 'it could be worse', citing friends or colleagues in other organisations or industries who worked longer hours or had more stressful jobs than they did.

As a number of authors have pointed out, an individual's 'employability' (i.e. their ability to secure employment) is fluid rather than fixed because it is necessarily determined by the number and type of vacancies available and relative to the employability of other competitors in the labour market (Brown et al, 2003). That participants hold themselves accountable for the maintenance and progression of their employment is consistent with previous research examining UK undergraduates' expectations of and attitudes towards careers and employability (Tomlinson, 2005; Power et al, 2013). However, once in employment this philosophy of individual responsibility comes into conflict with the bureaucratic structures that regulate collective work performance and advancement within organisations, and participants' ability to maintain or improve their employability (i.e. maintain access to other and/or better employment opportunities) is mediated, and often constrained, by their duties and obligations to their current employer. In order to maintain access to the multiplicity of 'potential' job opportunities within and outside their employing organisations, participants face the difficult task of continuing to demonstrate their value and commitment to their current employer in their current role, while also gaining the experience, skills and knowledge necessary to give them the option of securing other, different roles in this or other organisations.

Chapter six outlined the number and range of activities participants are engaged in, observing that the breadth of their activities combined with the size of their workload takes up a great deal of time and effort. In addition to the activities they are required to perform in the execution of their work tasks, many participants also engage in activities that they describe as supplementary to their paid work, yet essential to the performance of their job and/or the maintenance and progression of their employment. Such activities include: maintaining or updating their occupational or technical knowledge through reading or non-job-related participation in activities related to their occupation (e.g. maintaining an awareness of news stories); engaging with colleagues in other organisations working in a similar field (a number of teachers, for example, were active, in their professional capacity, on social media); and maintaining or developing their professional profile (e.g. contributing to professional journals; participating in or presenting at conferences). Most of these

activities were performed outside work due to time constraints during the working day.

Participants across all three occupations made reference to the importance of demonstrating their value as an employee in justification of their continued employment by the organisation. In this context, individual achievement becomes an indicator of a willingness and capacity to achieve (i.e. through commitment to personal investment) rather than evidence of an ability to perform a specific task, and consequently is primarily concerned with the future rather than the present or the past (Flecker and Hofbauer, 1998; Cremin, 2010; Frayne, 2015). Yet, as seen in chapter five, the mechanisms by which their achievements within their current employment are assessed are primarily concerned with their performance as it is now, not as it might be in the future, and the demands this work makes of their time and energy leaves little time in which to contemplate the past or imagine the future (Bunting, 2005). This conflict between the conditions, organisational objectives and management of their paid employment and the individual behaviours necessary to achieve and demonstrate their continuous professional development require participants to seek opportunities to develop and demonstrate their value as individuals within and around the shared objectives and practices of their employing organisation (Flecker and Hofbauer, 1998). These employment conditions further complicate participants' understanding of their responsibilities to themselves and their employers and the reconciliation of these tensions in the performance of their work.

The demands of participants' jobs

The empirical research described in this thesis sought to examine the work experiences of employees performing the kinds of non-standard 'knowledge-based' work for which a university education is expected to prepare them. The narratives of the journalists, teachers and solicitors who participated in the study offer insight into the precise nature of these discretionary roles, the specification and outcomes of their work tasks, processes, practices and time, and the employment, collegiate, personal and customer relationships participants have with the contributors to, and managers and consumers of, their work. Central to the experiences of participants across all three occupations is the management of uncertainty and unpredictability, the reconciliation of a multiplicity of, often contradictory, values and interests, and a

responsibility for determining the means of achieving their own and their employer's objectives.

The unpredictable and uncertain nature of their work obliges participants to exercise discretion in the performance of their tasks. In exercising this discretion, participants must draw upon their own understanding of the objectives, purpose and most appropriate practice of their work. The organisational and labour market conditions in which they operate facilitate and promote individualised working practices and the conception of work as an individual pursuit and experience. These employment and working conditions are informed by a philosophical individualism that values and rewards individual achievement, and attributes responsibility for performance to the individual (Archer, 2008; Türken et al, 2016). These conditions inform participants' understanding of their responsibilities to themselves, their employer, their colleagues and to the consumers of their work (including society more generally). Yet the conditions and philosophies that endorse individualised practices and privatised responsibility exist concurrently with bureaucratic mechanisms of control and organisation whose primary concern is with the collective pursuit of success. Similar tensions are present in participants' conception and achievement of career success, in which privatised responsibility for maintaining and advancing employment comes into conflict with organisational conditions that prioritise the present rather than the future, and opportunities for career progression come into conflict with conceptions of career success that value both advancement (i.e. according to bureaucratic mechanisms of progression associated with increased status, rewards and seniority) and achievement (i.e. valuable work; the ability to achieve personal occupational objectives).

Hinchcliffe (2013: 90) suggests that "it is important to differentiate an occupation from a job", arguing that while "an occupation implies a whole practice incorporating a set of skills, theoretical knowledge, technical know-how and an appropriate value set... a job is much less than that". In fact, the jobs performed by the participants in this study are much more than that, as the professional framework offered by their occupation is only one of the many competing frameworks to which they must attend and negotiate in the performance of their work. Such an assertion also implies that the values and preferred practices of a particular occupation are mutual, fixed concepts, an assumption dispelled by the narratives of the journalists, teachers and solicitors whose experiences are recounted in this thesis. What is significant about participants' occupational values is not their obedience to one fixed version of

their work, but the multiplicity of individual interpretations of (sometimes shared) features of their work that offer multiple versions of the same occupation, depending on the conditions of their work, organisation, field and the personal and occupational values to which they ascribe. The findings outlined here demonstrate that to fully understand the demands of graduates' work, it is necessary not only to understand the content and complexities of their tasks, but also to take account of the conditions of their work, the composition and context of their job, and the organisational and labour market conditions under which they are seeking to maintain and progress their employment.

Distinctions between individualised practices and the philosophies and/or conditions that facilitate them, and between autonomy in principle and autonomy in practice, are important because they go to the heart of one of the most demanding features of participants' work, which is the reconciliation and negotiation of competing paradigms in conditions that simultaneously compel and constrain participants' interpretative and practical autonomy (Bauman, 2000; Dawson, 2012). Barnett (2000a) describes this situation as one of 'supercomplexity', in which an individual is required to determine their own position in relation to the multiple competing frameworks that (could) govern their understanding and practice. Conditions of supercomplexity are characterised by unpredictable and uncertain environments (i.e. the contexts in which individuals are operating) and the contestability and challengability of the frameworks upon which understanding of these contexts is based (i.e. the assumptions and beliefs upon which individuals base their decisions and actions). In his description of the concept, Barnett gives the illustrative example of a doctor who, in the execution of their tasks, must determine what it means to practice medicine in the modern world (e.g. should they prioritise the safeguarding of resources, or the prevention or treatment of ill health? Are they providing a service to customers, or giving professional advice to clients?) (Barnett in conversation with Nixon et al, 1999: 563). The research presented here provides empirical evidence of these kinds of dilemmas as experienced by journalists, teachers and solicitors, suggesting that this conception of the challenges graduates face post-university, and their implications for higher education, is deserving of greater attention. This is discussed further in the next chapter.

It is important to be clear about the type and degree of participants' responsibilities. All participants, regardless of their seniority, are subject to the management of the senior managers above them. As such, their freedom is constrained by the

organisational circumstances in which they are situated. However, their operational responsibilities are such that they are required to exercise a great deal of discretion in order to achieve their tasks. Equally, while not necessarily always empowered to make the final decisions about how to proceed in terms of the strategic decision-making (e.g. in a legal case, the final strategy might be decided by the Partner; in teaching, final decisions for the allocation of funding or school strategy would be decided by head teachers; in journalism, decisions regarding the target audiences for content and publication might be decided by editors, producers or owners), participants are all expected to contribute to this decision-making process through their advice, ideas and feedback. These contributions may not always be taken on board, but participation in the decision-making process is part of their job, in part because senior leaders and employers are dealing with similar challenges regarding the uncertain and unpredictable nature of the work. A lack of strategic authority or control is not, in these roles, a reliable indicator of the degree to which participants are expected to give something of themselves and their own ideas and views in their work.

Limits of a skills-based conception of graduates' work

It is clear, then, that a skills-based conception of work is inadequate to the task of describing and understanding the demands of the kinds of non-standard, discretionary work discussed in this thesis, in that it assumes that job content is a reliable indicator of the demands jobs make of the people performing them. Narrowly defining of work performance as “the application of skills and intellect”, this conception takes little to no account of the conditions of work, nor of the inter-relationship between the specification and enactment of work tasks (Hinchcliffe, 2013: 90). Felstead (2016) notes that there is a difference between drawing on concepts of skill to analyse the complexity of a job (e.g. the techniques and knowledge(s) required) and using concepts of skill to describe the degree and nature of discretion required in its performance. However, where skills-based conceptions of work may be helpful in describing the content of jobs (i.e. the activities the occupant performs), they are limited in their ability to describe and explain the demands of these activities, particularly the nature of any autonomy or discretion, beyond establishing the organisational frameworks within which these arise (e.g. a skills-based conception of work can describe the division of responsibilities, but not the implications of these for experience of work performance). Understanding of discretion in graduates' work, for example, must

take into account the nature and demands of this discretion and the conditions of its enactment, particularly when discretion is exercised amidst conditions of supercomplexity (i.e. where the decision-making requires the negotiation of competing conceptions of the task). A skills-based approach to work (or higher education) treats skills as 'attributes' of jobs and people (Attewell, 1990). Aside from the value judgements implicit in identification of 'high' and 'low' skills, one of the main problems with relying on skills-based conceptions of work in higher education is that in seeking to render "thousands of qualitatively different tasks commensurable in terms of common dimensions" the categories used to describe and understand work become "highly abstract as they try to span many highly diverse tasks" (Attewell, 1990: 427). This abstraction means that skills-based descriptions of work are necessarily far removed from the conditions in which activities are performed. In so far as the work performed by teachers, journalists and solicitors is concerned, this excludes some of the most demanding features of their work.

The implications of the abstract and de-contextualised nature of concepts of skill for the conception and education of 'generic' skills remain hotly contested (Barrow, 1987; Hyland and Johnson, 1998; Hinchcliffe, 2002). The concern here is that a conception of work that takes no account of the implications of the conditions and experience of work for the demands it makes of the people performing it is limited in the contribution it can make to understanding of the role higher education might or should play in facilitating the development of capacities equal to these demands. What Attewell (1990) describes as the 'theoretical reach' of skills-based conceptions of both work and higher education is both short and narrow, limiting imagination of the possible relationships between the two. The focus on job content rather than the conditions of work practice also means that skill-based conceptions of work underestimate heterogeneity in both job roles and individual experience of work. It assumes that demand for and engagement with particular kinds of disciplinary knowledge (e.g. law) is uniform across all organisations within a given industry (or across industries), yet one of the defining features of participants' narratives is the variation in occupational practices and the bodies of knowledge upon which they rely within as well as across each occupation. Where a skills-based conception of work may be valuable in determining categories of task for the purposes of comparison, its assumption of a uniformity of content, practice and experience upon which these categories are based means it is inadequate for understanding the

demands similar kinds of jobs make of different participants in different organisational, occupational and labour market settings.

Conclusion

This chapter has summarised the demands of participants' work, and explained why a skills-based conception of work fails to capture the complexity, conditions and challenges of these graduates' roles. The next chapter of this thesis discusses the implications of these findings for understanding and imagination of the relationship between higher education and work, and asks whether the skills-based employment-focused conception of higher education that currently dominates policy making is adequate to the task of preparing students for the kinds of work performed by the participants in this study. The discussion examines the degree to which a skills-based higher education for employability and employment limits understanding and imagination of the purpose and outcomes of a higher education, and considers whether an alternative approach might facilitate a more productive understanding of the relationship between higher education and paid employment.

Chapter 8

Discussion

Taking complexity into account: from a higher education for employment to a higher education for performance

This chapter discusses the implications of the findings described in previous chapters for understanding of the relationship between higher education and work. It identifies some of the most challenging features of participants' work and considers whether the skills-based employability-focused model that currently informs so much of higher education policy and practice is well-suited to preparing students to meet the demands of these jobs²⁶.

Meeting the demands of graduates' work: the challenge for higher education

The analyses presented in the last four chapters have suggested that one of the most important features of the non-standard, discretionary work performed by journalists, teachers and solicitors is the performance of partially-specified tasks in uncertain and unpredictable conditions, in which the specification and outcomes of tasks and objectives are contestable and of interest to a multiplicity of parties, all of whom have different, often competing, priorities. Successful performance of this kind of work is reliant upon the successful resolution of, and purposeful action within, this uncertainty.

Clarifying, progressing and managing their work tasks in these conditions requires participants to determine the nature and degree of their responsibilities, and the

²⁶ To be clear, this discussion is concerned with the skills-based, employment-focused model of higher education as outlined by those principally concerned with higher education policy (e.g. the government, universities, and university and business representatives) in so far as the philosophy that underpins it informs the way the outcomes of higher education are understood and assessed (e.g. the reliance on performance indicators concerned with graduate employment; the expectation that employability skills should be integrated into the academic curriculum). In practice, it is likely that implementation of this model is mediated by the values and priorities of those engaged in designing and delivering the academic curriculum (e.g. academic staff), but the priorities and practices it espouses are important in determining the purpose and practice of higher education, and its relationship to work, as these are understood by students, senior leaders in higher education institutions, employers, the media and the public.

scope and purpose of their job role and work activities. This is an on-going process of task and job definition and specification. It includes the designation of the boundaries of tasks and clarification of the occupational boundaries of their role and the organisational boundaries of their job (of time and effort, as well as of purpose). It also requires participants: to determine the needs of (and their obligations to) the different groups who claim an interest or stake in their work, and to reconcile these different interests; and to prioritise and attach value to the different activities and outcomes of their work in order to organise and manage their time and tasks. This specification is performed in response to the continually changing (and unpredictable) content and circumstances of their jobs and tasks and informed by the different account(s) of their work they choose to endorse (i.e. some combination of the different objectives and purposes to which their employer, the regulator, occupational group to which they belong, they themselves, and the consumers of their work subscribe). It is facilitated by the interpersonal work (with colleagues, managers and the consumers of their work) that enables participants to access advice and support and to challenge and clarify ideas (their own and those of others). This dialogue also helps to mitigate some of the risk associated with forming views on the best action to take in order to complete non-standard tasks whose outcome remains unknown until it has been achieved, whose objective is only partially specified, and whose nature and demands are constantly evolving and consequently extremely unpredictable.

The result of all this is that participants have a large degree of operational autonomy in the performance of their work, and are held personally responsible for its outcome. However, as employees, they have little strategic autonomy over the means by which their performance and achievements are measured and assessed. Performing this kind of non-standard, discretionary work thus brings with it a number of challenges, namely: of managing, evaluating and prioritising a large number of tasks and volume of information; of reconciling multiple, often contradictory, accounts of work; of taking responsibility for, ownership of and decisions about their work when the freedom with which they might act is limited by constraints of time and a lack of strategic control; of dealing with responsibility without authority; of acting purposefully and mitigating risk in conditions of uncertainty.

The demands of participants' work

In performing their work, participants are faced with situations of complexity (an excess of both tasks and information) and supercomplexity (a series of competing frameworks through which these tasks and information might be understood) (Nixon et al, 1999; Barnett, 2000a; 2012). Barnett (2012) draws a distinction between these two conditions, arguing that where complexity could, theoretically, be resolved if enough time and resource were devoted to the task of untangling and reconciling the various propositions, it is impossible to resolve the competing frameworks of supercomplexity because they are often mutually incompatible. This distinction is important in clarifying the different nature and composition of the two conditions and their associated challenges, but it also creates a conceptual estrangement between the two that risks misrepresenting the nature and demands of complexity as it exists and is experienced in conditions of supercomplexity (e.g. in non-standard, discretionary paid work). For the participants in this study, both the composition and resolution of complexity in their work (e.g. their web of obligations; the value they attach to the knowledge, ideas, activities they engage with, and the implications this has for the way they choose to prioritise their tasks and time) is necessarily informed by their interpretation and valuation of the multiplicity of competing frameworks (e.g. professional, organisational, commercial, consumer, personal) that inform their and others' (e.g. employers', consumers') understanding of the purpose and practice of that work. Consequently, in these kinds of roles, the challenges of coping with complexity and supercomplexity are necessarily interrelated.

Participants are therefore tasked with: firstly, choosing between (or seeking to partly reconcile or integrate) the different frameworks that might govern their work practices and values, and secondly, attaching value to different tasks, objectives, outcomes and rewards in order to determine which ones to prioritise and the amount of time and effort to devote to them (and to their job as a whole). These choices are pivotal to the performance of non-standard, discretionary work because it is participants' understanding of the purpose of their work that informs the day-to-day decisions they take in the interpretation and performance of their tasks (e.g. which stories to pursue and how much time and energy to expend pursuing them; how to balance pastoral, administrative, teaching, and planning activities; how much detail to go into with a client when seeking to understand their legal problem; how long to stay in the office; how much work to do in the evening and at weekends).

Performance of these tasks requires that participants are able to act purposefully without being overwhelmed by the nature and degree of choice.

Acting purposefully in conditions of complexity and supercomplexity also requires that participants take ownership of their choices, even when the conditions are not of their choosing and do not lead to their preferred outcome. Chapter seven drew on Bauman's (2000) distinction between *de jure* autonomy (autonomy in principle) and *de facto* autonomy (autonomy in practice) to describe the challenges participants face in bridging the gap between the assertion of their autonomy (e.g. by their employers, by themselves), and their relative lack of material autonomy in situations where their freedom to meet the responsibilities they have been assigned is constrained by other conditions of their work (e.g. the objectives of their employer; the way their performance is managed and assessed). Consequently, one of the most demanding features of participants' work is that while they must understand and contend with a multiplicity of perspectives and choices, they are not 'free' to choose between them. The value other parties attach to different outcomes and objectives necessarily informs participants' own views and choices (e.g. participants have to balance their employment security and career ambitions with their occupational and personal values). Participants themselves are very aware of this conflict, its complexity and of their responsibilities in relation to resolving it. In employment in particular, compliance with or resistance to different perspectives or views carries risks and rewards (e.g. of being viewed as committed or uncommitted to organisational goals; of securing access to opportunities for career advancement or being labelled as uncooperative). Yet, in performing this kind of non-standard, discretionary work, coming to and voicing their own view on the best way to achieve a particular task is an integral part of participants' jobs (e.g. solicitors are expected to contribute their own ideas to discussions about legal problems; journalists are expected to come up with and pursue their own stories; teachers are expected to identify ways of dealing with disruptive or struggling pupils and to take action to improve the situation). Taking positive action within this context thus requires imagination and understanding of the assumptions and values that underpin different views, options or strategies, of the criteria by which claims and outcomes might be assessed, the means by which decisions might be justified, and the reasons for amending views in light of the opinions of others.

The challenge of taking ownership of their decisions is further complicated by the conditions of uncertainty and unpredictability in which participants are operating.

Acting purposively in conditions of uncertainty and unpredictability is demanding because it requires participants to be both flexible and open to change, but also robust and willing to defend their positions and decisions. It is incumbent upon them to identify not only the best course of action, but also, first, the direction that action should take. Participants across all three occupations agreed that confidence in, and the ability to justify and defend, the choices, practices, ideas and judgements upon which they make decisions and base their practice is integral to the successful performance of their work. This task is central to the performance of all three roles, and is both interpretative and analytical (informed by participants' appraisal of the purpose and responsibilities of their work and the expectations and objectives of their employers and consumers), but also one of attaching value to different tasks, activities, rewards and outcomes. It requires participants not only to come to their own view, but also to be committed to it: to be able to justify how and why they have arrived at this view, and to defend that decision with reference to the criteria by which the outcome and performance of their work is commonly judged. Integral to participants' confidence in, and ability to mount a robust defence of, their actions and decisions is their investment in, and commitment to, the choices they make.

Confidence in, and ownership of, their choices and views plays an important role in facilitating participants' performance of discretionary work in uncertain and unpredictable conditions, but this confidence is arrived at partly by engaging with the ideas and views of other people. It is this sociable practice that helps them to refine, clarify and test their own ideas and decisions, and to progress their work by engaging with, and taking account of, the ideas and views of other parties (e.g. managers, colleagues, consumers) in order to negotiate and develop consensus around the objectives and desired outcomes of their tasks. This discussion is central to participants' management of uncertainty of their work, as they commonly discuss problems, ideas and concerns with colleagues in an effort to seek advice, identify solutions to problems and challenge their own ideas in order to mitigate some of the risk associated with the discretionary nature of their roles. It also underpins the contribution participants are expected to make to the progression of collective work tasks and the achievement of collective organisational objectives in offering their own ideas on, or solutions to, issues and problems, and evaluating and responding to the suggestions of others.

Integral to the performance of these kinds of non-standard, discretionary work is imagination of what might be done (and why), evaluation of what could be done

(and why), and the taking of decisions as to what should be done (and why). These tasks are primarily concerned with thinking rather than doing, but their performance is dependent upon participants' ability and willingness to engage with and seek to understand the context in which they are operating and the people with whom they are working. It also relies on their understanding of the means and criteria by which different options and opinions might be examined and assessed, and their confidence in the conclusions to which they come. Participants' understanding, development and utilisation of these different kinds of knowledge is consequently central to their performance of their work. The question is: does a skills-based employment-focused higher education offer adequate preparation for the performance of these activities?

Limitations of a skills-based model of higher education

The accumulation of information and its organisation for use... the acquirement of techniques, whether practical or reflective, for its application... this is not the whole of education... but rather the minimum. [Educators] should be under no illusion that it constitutes the whole of education, or that it can be treated as if it were the paramount aspect.

J. Macmurray, 2012: 672-673.

For higher education to help graduates in their performance of their paid work, it must take account of the demands this work makes of them, drawing on an understanding of performance that pays attention to the conditions as well as a the content of graduates' jobs (Dewey, 1938; Barnett, 2000a; 2000b; 2009; 2012; Dall-Alba and Barnacle, 2007). Chapter seven explained why a skills-based conception of work is inadequate for this purpose, observing that its narrow focus on the content and specification of jobs provides an incomplete picture of participants' work tasks and roles, taking no account of the conditions that inform the challenges associated with their performance. Yet the model of work that currently informs much UK higher education policy and practice, focused as it is on securing graduates' progression into employment, remains underpinned by the skills-based conceptions of work that inform organisational recruitment and selection processes (e.g. Rees et al, 2007; CBI/UUK, 2009; CBI/NUS, 2011). As a result, it takes little account of the complexity of the situations graduates are likely to encounter in their

work, focusing instead on the strategies they might need to accomplish the tasks they might be expected to perform.

One of the key findings of this research is that dealing with the uncertain and unpredictable conditions of their tasks and employment situation is one of the most demanding features of the non-standard, discretionary work performed by the participants in this study. It is important to their performance of the partially specified and unpredictable work tasks that comprise their roles (e.g. in responding to the demands of tasks as they develop and evolve). It is also important to their resolution of the ambiguity of the role itself (e.g. prioritising their activities, tasks, objectives, time and effort; reconciling the competing accounts of their work purpose etc.). In performing their work participants must contend with reconciling or choosing between competing accounts of their work in conditions in which some accounts (and interests) are credited more authority or power than others (e.g. the outcomes their employer expects them to achieve may not deliver the outcomes their consumers expect, yet the participant is responsible for meeting the needs of the consumer and for achieving their employer's organisational objectives – they are beholden to their employer as the party who provides their salary and continued employment, yet also obligated to the consumer. Their employer is also obligated to the consumer, but not necessarily on the same grounds. Determining a course of action in this context depends on the participant's appraisal of the risks and rewards of meeting the different objectives of these two parties, as well as their interpretation of these objectives within the context of the task). The skills-based model of higher education takes little of this into account, assuming that the act of applying skills and knowledge is largely unproblematic on the basis that work performance can be understood as the disinterested enactment of tasks uncomplicated by conflict, value judgement or the need to balance competing interests (Quinlan, 2016).

The narrow focus on the act of achieving a particular outcome (e.g. the act of analysis; the act of determining a course of action), similarly excludes any conception of the purpose of and reason for that action, or the processes leading up to its enactment. Problem solving, for example, is described as “analysing facts and situations and applying creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions” (CBI/UUK, 2009: 8), while judgement is “[determining] the most appropriate course of action and [drawing] conclusions that are based on logical assumptions that reflect factual information” (Rees et al, 2007: 141). For an employer seeking to recruit somebody into a role, this simplification of performance makes some sense, in that they are

concerned primarily with securing the services of a person who can achieve these outcomes, not with the means by which they might be achieved. The priorities of a higher education concerned with *preparing* students for work, on the other hand, are necessarily concerned with developing the kinds of abilities and knowledge that can facilitate achievement of these outcomes, and this demands a much more comprehensive understanding of the way these activities are performed and the challenges they entail.

Where the strategies by which a particular outcome may be achieved might be considered 'objective' (in that they exist independently of the person employing them), the "moving springs" of this action (i.e. the reasons for choosing a strategy and the purpose to which it is being put) are not (Dewey, 1938: 70). Conceiving of work performance as a primarily practical task (i.e. of the application of skill or knowledge to a particular situation) overlooks the role participants themselves play in determining the character and requirements of their tasks and the means by which these might best be achieved. This analysis, evaluation and interpretation of the composition and demands of work tasks, and of their employers' (and their own) objectives and preferred outcomes, is informed by the participants' own assessment as to what might be relevant to this evaluation. Coming to this decision requires that participants are not only sensitive to the data or features of the situation or task relevant to this evaluation (as one participant put it, that they are 'alive to the detail' of the situations they are faced with), but also that they can give meaning to this data in view of the context and purpose of the task. This is achieved partly through observation of the situation (i.e. engaging with the material details relevant to the task), but also through imagination of the different ways in which this data could be viewed (and the different outcomes of these positions) and the value that might be attached to them in different situations or by different people (i.e. thinking about the situation in a more abstract way) (Macmurray, 2012). In focusing only on the practical strategies by which tasks might be achieved, a skills-based higher education neglects the thinking that is a necessary precursor to and facilitator of this action.

Developing a broad 'horizon of vision' that extends beyond their knowledge of the techniques they might employ to perform a particular activity, to an engagement with the contextual features and priorities that can help to clarify their understanding of the overall purpose of the task, is central to participants' performance of their work (Sennett, 2009; Walker, 2012). It is also pivotal to their ability to engage and

communicate with, and explain their work to, 'non-experts' (e.g. colleagues in different fields; consumers) who are unfamiliar with the nature and content of their work (Sennett, 2009). This "sociable expertise" (Sennett, 2009: 247) is important in all aspects of participants' work, not only in their performance of individual tasks (e.g. engaging with clients, audiences, pupils, parents), but also in dealing with the challenges imposed by the particular organisational and work conditions in which they are operating (e.g. seeking support or advice from colleagues or managers; mitigating risk in their decision-making; justifying the decisions they make during the course of their work). As discussed in chapters five and six, different organisational circumstances can make sociable practice more or less difficult (particularly conditions that foster competition rather than collaboration), but in most cases it is incumbent upon individual participants to maintain a sociable disposition regardless of the circumstances.

A skills-based higher education for employment is limited in the contribution it can make to the development of these sociable dispositions and expertise because it takes no account of the situated character of jobs and tasks, presenting work as a primarily solitary rather than a sociable activity. Informed by the view that higher education is primarily an 'investment' in one's own human capital, the skills-based model is primarily concerned with developing students' own attributes in order to meet the perceived needs of a future employer, rather than with facilitating their inter-relationship with the wider world (Vu and Dall'Alba, 2014). Although a number of authors have sought to improve upon skills-based conceptions of employability to develop a broader understanding of the idea of 'graduateness' (e.g. as personal literacy, attributes, qualities, critical self reflection, metacognition), these continue to focus on the characteristics possessed by the individual, rather than their engagement with the rest of the world (Harvey, 2000; Washer, 2007; Yorke, 2010; Rust and Froud, 2011; Pegg et al, 2012). Even descriptions of nominally 'social' skills, such as interpersonal sensitivity ("recognises and respects different perspectives and appreciates the benefits of being open to the ideas and views of others", Rees et al, 2007: 141) and team working ("co-operating, negotiating, persuading, contributing to discussions", CBI/UUK, 2009: 8) are presented as attributes rather than dispositions or ways of thinking. Yet the kinds of sociable practices participants engage in during the course of their work are less about employing particular strategies for socialising, and more about being disposed towards open-mindedness rather than insularity in their thinking (Zeldin, 1999; Sennett, 2009).

In addition, in focusing on the act of communicating, the skills-based model of higher education is concerned exclusively with the presentation rather than the development of ideas and opinions. Where the former is concerned with articulating or eliciting existing views, the latter is about engaging with those views to further understanding (Zeldin, 1999). This latter activity is more accurately described as conversation, in that it comprises a two-way dialogue. The difference between communication (as it is understood by the skills-based model) and conversation is that:

Conversation is not just about conveying information [or] putting ideas into people's heads. The experts can help you to understand these mechanisms. But to try to learn to converse better by applying some technique... won't get you very far... Conversation is a meeting of minds... when minds meet, they don't just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought (Zeldin, 1999: 9).

Conversation is thus a cooperative activity, "an exchange in which [both] participants benefit from the encounter" (Sennett, 2013: 5).

Conversation plays an important role in facilitating participants' performance of their work. It is the means by which participants develop their views, clarify the aims and purposes of their tasks, elicit advice and support of their colleagues and managers, and engage with the consumers of their work (Eekelaar et al, 2000). The value of these conversations is in the contribution other people's ideas and views make to participants' own understanding of themselves and their own views, as well as the opportunities they offer for testing out ideas, and for developing understanding and rapport between participants and the different parties with whom they must work. Participants engage in two different types of conversation in the performance of their work. The first is dialectic conversation, which facilitates a synthesis of ideas or views through what Sennett (2013: 18) describes as "the verbal play of opposites... the aim [of which] is to come eventually to a common understanding". The second is a more dialogic conversation, which facilitates an exchange of ideas through which each participant improves their understanding of their own and others' ideas and views.

Participants engage in dialectic conversations to achieve consensus as to how to progress their tasks. Solicitors, for example, engage in this kind of conversation with

their client in determining how to progress their case. Journalists might discuss their stories with editors in order to come to an agreement as to what angle to pursue. If a pupil were misbehaving, a teacher would engage in this kind of discussion with the head of their department and the pupil's parents in order to determine how to best to resolve it. Their participation in dialogic forms of conversation is more reflexive, helping them to develop and clarify their own views and improve their understanding of the views of others (Sennett, 2013). Participants in all three occupational groups engaged in this kind of discussion with colleagues when they were struggling with a particular problem, seeking feedback on their own approach and learning from the suggestions, ideas and experiences of others. In offering few opportunities for the development of this kind of sociable expertise, the skills-based model of higher education makes little contribution to students' development of the dispositions and understanding that enable this kind of activity.

Finally, coping with responsibility for the performance and organisation of their work and the maintenance of their employment is central to participants' performance of their jobs. Some responsibilities are assigned to them, but require interpretation by the participant as tasks are executed (e.g. employers and regulators determine solicitors' responsibilities to their clients, but the precise nature of this responsibility, and its implications for the boundaries of their tasks and job role, is determined by solicitors during the course of their work). Other responsibilities participants take upon themselves, such as those regarding their career outcomes, and their responsibilities to their family regarding time or income, or to society regarding the broader purpose of their work. Reconciling these responsibilities is one of the most demanding aspects of their jobs. In a skills-based higher education for employment, this reconciliation of responsibilities is conceived as something that can be 'managed' through the application of effective time management, organisation and communication skills (e.g. the acts of prioritising tasks; negotiating sensible deadlines; asking for help). However, this fails to take into account the fact that the challenge of resolving these obligations is one of choosing between competing accounts of work in order to determine how different tasks might be prioritised, and on what basis one might be prioritised over another.

In journalism, teaching and law the uncertain and constantly evolving nature of the work means that task objectives and outcomes are only partially specified in advance. Consequently, decision-making regarding the priority and importance of tasks is an on-going process of evaluation, in which participants must judge the

significance, value and purpose of the tasks and situations with which they are presented in view of their broader interpretation of the interests and expectations of the various parties to whom they have responsibilities. Where knowledge and understanding of the different strategies they might adopt facilitates participants' understanding of the different ways activities, tasks, situations and problems might be achieved or resolved, this knowledge can only offer possibilities rather than certainty as to how to progress. In de-contextualising work tasks in this way, a skills-based higher education for employment supplies students with a repertoire of strategies through which they might achieve particular ends, but offers little facility for the development of capacities required to assess the desirability or implications of the ends themselves (Pring, 2012). A higher education concerned primarily with the development of operational capabilities (i.e. the means of acting), to the exclusion of any conception of the faculties or dispositions that facilitate determination of the direction and purpose of that action, is inadequate to the task of preparing students for the challenges they will face in performing non-standard, discretionary work in unpredictable and uncertain conditions (as well as in post-university life more generally).

Limitations of an employment-focused model of higher education

*What matters is whether you are willing to think for yourself,
and to say what you think.*

T. Zeldin, 1999: 10.

The way the purpose of higher education and its relationship to work is presented is important because it informs students' understanding of their participation in the educational process and their expectations of its outcome (Hacking, 1986). In an employment-focused model of higher education the educational process is valued primarily for the opportunities to which it provides access (e.g. well-paid jobs), rather than for the opportunities it affords in and of itself (Glover et al, 2002; Nixon et al, 2011; Naidoo and Whitty, 2013; Tomlinson, 2015). In prioritising employability, universities present higher education as a means of accessing 'good' jobs (and achieving social mobility), where success is measured in terms of salaries (e.g. the graduate premium) and participation in material consumption (Molesworth et al, 2009; Haywood et al, 2011; Williams, 2013). Presented as a credential to be obtained rather than an experience in which to participate, the best indicator of a

'good' outcome becomes a graduates' employment and salary outcomes (e.g. as detailed by the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey and Key Information Sets), and it is upon this basis that students are advised to choose a course that represents 'good value for money' (BIS, 2011; Naidoo and Williams, 2015)²⁷.

The contractual arrangement the student-consumer and their institution enter is thus perceived to offer some guarantee as to the achievement of a particular outcome (e.g. the 2.1 that will secure entry to a graduate job) if students are judged to have met certain prescribed criteria (Williams, 2013; Naidoo and Williams, 2015). As a result, learning activities are conceived as supplying evidence of particular traits, rather than as a way of exposing students to particular kinds of ideas, practices or challenges. When viewed as recipients of, rather than participants in, the educational experience, McArthur (2012) suggests that students' experience of higher education becomes akin to visiting a stately home in which onlookers are allowed to observe but not interfere with any of the exhibits (or, in this case, ideas) on show. This silencing of students' own views and ideas prompts them to distance themselves from their learning (and the observations and opinions they might offer) in order to comply with the criteria by which their performance will be judged (Bonnett and Cuypers, 2004; Richardson, 2004; McArthur, 2012). The analyses outlined in this thesis suggest that participants' confidence in, and commitment to, their own views is more than a merely desirable embellishment: it is actually central to the successful performance of non-standard, discretionary work. Yet an employment-focused higher education achieves the opposite, inhibiting students' development of their own ideas, promoting compliance with the views that are perceived to deliver good marks and discouraging them from voicing or investing in any of their own (Barnett, 2000a; 2007a; 2007b; McArthur, 2009; Batchelor, 2014).

The employment-focused model thus risks encouraging students to become passive learners, concerned primarily with their degree classification and reluctant to entertain risk (e.g. in their choice of modules; in responding to essay questions) in case this jeopardises their job prospects (Molesworth et al, 2009; Nixon et al, 2011; Williams, 2013; Lynch and Hennessy, 2015; Naidoo and Williams, 2015; Bunce et al, 2016). The recent introduction of the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), in which details of overall student performance are supplemented by information on

²⁷ See HESA (2016) and HEFCE (2010) for further details of these indicators.

performance in individual modules, adds further weight to this view, giving students concerned with their employment outcomes even less incentive to take risks and experiment during the course of their university participation. Intended to replace the degree classification, the HEAR offers 'a more comprehensive record of student achievement', but in so doing further reduces higher education to the documentation of achievement rather than an experience of participation in an educational process (UUK, 2007; 2012).

Yet engaging with and managing risk is central to acting purposefully within the conditions of uncertainty and unpredictability that the journalists, teachers and solicitors in this study contend with every day. In treating higher education as a pre-packaged product with a pre-determined outcome, rather than a process in which students' participation determines the end product, this model of higher education provides very little opportunity for students to engage and become familiar with the kinds of uncertainty they will need to take action in during the course of their employment (Barnett, 1998; 2012; Naidoo and Whitty, 2013)²⁸. As Collini (2011: 12) points out, "the paradox of real learning is that you don't get what you 'want' – and you certainly can't buy it... hacking your way through the jungle of unintelligibility to a few small clearings of partial intelligibility is a demanding and not always enjoyable process". The uncertain and unpredictable conditions of their tasks and employment mean that participants experience similar kinds of frustration and intellectual fatigue in the interpretation, management, organisation, and achievement of their work. In creating conditions in which students feel obligated to avoid rather than seek to engage with risk, and to conform with the practices and views of others rather than develop and seek to defend views of their own, an employment-focused higher education is likely to inhibit rather than facilitate development of the very of intellectual and social abilities and dispositions that are of most value in the performance of non-standard, discretionary work.

²⁸ Research by Tomlinson (2015; 2016: 9) suggests that while not all students consider themselves to be 'consumers' of education, "a tension prevails in distancing oneself from consumerism on the one hand and an over-riding perception that formal education is something that is 'paid for'" on the other. Incidentally, the tension between the competing accounts of higher education (e.g. the achievement of a decent financial return on their investment relative to the costs of their participation versus personal and intellectual development) offers an example of supercomplexity to which students are intimately connected. Seeking to eradicate or minimise this tension may therefore be less helpful (and more futile) than engaging with students' experience of it, in that it provides an opportunity to make explicit the nature and conditions of this kind of dilemma, the likes of which students are likely to encounter again and again in their post-university life (Bunce et al, 2016).

One reason for the prescriptive nature of a higher education for employment is its focus on the needs of employers (or, more specifically, the jobs to which they are recruiting) rather than on students themselves. The domination of the concept of the 'generic' graduate is such that even those authors who advocate a higher education for personal growth continue to draw on the language of 'graduate attributes' when describing the purpose of higher education (e.g. Barnett, 2006; Kreber, 2014b). However, even when held to signify qualities or dispositions rather than skills, the term 'attributes' is unhelpful because it perpetuates the idea that a higher education is concerned primarily with turning out a particular kind of person (e.g. someone who possess a specific set of abilities), rather than offering a particular kind of educational encounter through which students develop their own ways of dealing with particular kinds of challenges (e.g. acting purposefully amidst uncertainty). The findings presented here suggest that any similarities between the knowledges, dispositions and abilities that facilitate participants' performance of their work (e.g. openness to alternative ideas; a sociable disposition; imagination of alternative points of view and evaluation of their implications for a particular task) are accompanied by equally important differences in participants' interpretation, adoption and enactment of these ways of thinking and acting. These differences are informed by differences in participants' personalities, personal values and occupational priorities, their interpretation of the purpose and responsibilities of their work, and their preferred ways of working. Yet in focusing on the generic needs of employers rather than specific needs of students in meeting the demands of this employment, an employment-focused higher education treats students as 'objects' to be 'transformed' for the purposes of others, rather than in ways that "are personally significant or valuable to them" (Pring, 2012: 749).

Ronald Barnett is one of the few authors to offer an alternative to an employment-focused higher education that focuses on the personal rather than the societal outcomes of higher education (i.e. the benefits for the individual student rather than the contribution graduates can make towards the public good). In his view, this:

Is a matter of value... in the end I do believe that it is important that individuals take responsibility for their actions, for their utterances and for the way they project themselves in the world... I'm part of the Western tradition in that sense... we do have a responsibility for our actions on an individual basis, much as we might want to help sustain that through collective effort (Barnett in conversation with Nixon et al, 1999: 569).

However, even he focuses for the most part on the means by which higher education might help students to develop the kinds of general dispositions he identifies as being important, rather than the way students themselves might develop their own unique versions of these dispositions in accordance with their own personalities and preferences (Barnett, 2007b; 2009). The narratives of journalists, teachers and solicitors explored in this thesis indicate that its focus on developing graduates' attributes (as identified and assessed for in recruitment and selection processes) limits the role a skills-based employment-focused higher education can play in preparing students for the challenges of work performance because it conflates outcomes with traits. In this model, 'flexibility' and 'adaptability' are conceived as attributes students can possess, but the analyses presented here suggest that they are better understood as being the outcome of a particular way of viewing, managing and acting in unpredictable and uncertain situations. Viewing them in this way allows for individual differences in the way different graduates deal with similar challenges and draw on the strategies that best suit their personal strengths, values and preferred ways of working to achieve similarly successful outcomes.

Much of the literature on higher education is concerned with articulating its purpose with regard to the collective contribution graduates might make to wider society (e.g. economic growth, democratic participation, social change) (Collini, 2010; Nussbaum, 2009; Walker and Boni, 2013). The employment-focused model of higher education is one of the few to seek to articulate the personal outcomes that benefit students themselves (albeit in terms of financial and occupational reward), but its narrow focus on graduates' access to employment opportunities means that its concern is with the achievement of the generic attributes employers use to recruit to positions, rather than the unique character of these capacities and dispositions as they are developed by individual students. Yet it is participants' understanding and employment of the strategies and ways of acting and thinking that work best for them that contributes most to their performance of their non-standard, discretionary work.

Earlier chapters described how participants' understanding of their strengths and limitations and their personal occupational values and priorities are central to their performance of work, not only in informing their interpretation and decision-making regarding the purpose and practice of their work, but also to the choices they make regarding the strategies and positions they choose to adopt in order to achieve a

desired outcome. As noted above, these choices are informed not only by participants' values and ambitions, but also by their preferred ways of working (e.g. when asking difficult questions of a potentially uncooperative interviewee, some journalists felt they achieved better results when they were more aggressive and persisted in securing an answer to their questions; others were more comfortable seeking to engage the interviewee in conversation e.g. 'you know I have to ask you this...' having found that this strategy worked well for them). This alignment between their personal values and ideals for their work and the choices they make in the interpretation and performance of their work tasks gives focus to their decision-making in uncertain and unpredictable conditions, facilitating their identification and evaluation of what might be significant and meaningful about the tasks and situations they encounter (De Ruyter and Conroy, 2002; see also chapter four)²⁹. It also gives them the confidence, energy and will to both take positions on issues, situations or tasks, and to act on them (e.g. in relation to how best to perform a task; what to prioritise; when to go home) (Kreber et al, 2007). These ideals and preferences are not fixed, but evolved and changed as participants expanded their repertoires of experience and acquaintances. Participants developed their understanding of the 'ideal' journalist, teacher or solicitor, for example, by observing and evaluating the approaches and practices of their colleagues, choosing to model themselves on those whose practices most closely aligned with their own values and preferred ways of working. The attributes and values participants admired varied significantly, informed by the particular circumstances, specialisms and environments in which they were working, as well as their own understanding of the value and purpose of their role, and their personal views as to the ethics and efficacy of different kinds of practice.

The nature of this personal commitment to, investment in, and acceptance of responsibility for the choices they make is usefully captured by the concept of 'authenticity', in that it is their genuine belief in the validity of the choices they make that gives participants the confidence to "take a stand" in the situations they encounter (Barnett, 2007b; Kreber, 2014a; 2014b; Vu and Dall'Alba, 2014: 778).

²⁹ Heyting (2004) draws a distinction between ideals as criteria by which achievements can be judged (i.e. 'images of excellence') and ideals as attainable goals. This distinction is helpful in clarifying the role ideals play in shaping participants' work, in that it takes account of the fact that, in practice, elucidation and achievement of participants' own objectives are necessarily mediated by the competing objectives of other parties (e.g. their employers). Participants themselves made reference to this when they drew a distinction between the 'ideal' journalist, teacher or solicitor, and the conditions and practices of their own work. In this discussion, the term 'ideal' is used to refer to the 'images of excellence' that guide participants' practice.

Chapters four and six observed that while participants acknowledged that they were not free to pursue their work in any way they might choose (constrained by the objectives of their employer, as well as the multiplicity of demands on their time and effort), they retained a large degree of control over the performance, organisation and boundaries of their work and were thus able to choose how to act within these constraints (Bonnett, 1978; Bonnett and Cuypers, 2003). Pursuing authenticity in their performance (i.e. seeking to act in accordance with their own views and principles, despite the constraints within which they are operating) thus provides participants with a (relatively) stable platform upon which they can develop an understanding of the best way to approach the tasks and situations they encounter, even if only to acknowledge the limits of their autonomy with regard to a particular situation, and assess how critical this lack of control is with regard to their broader concerns (e.g. their aims and purposes for their work; their ethical values; their career ambitions). In employment-focused conceptions of higher education, notions of authenticity are commonly concerned with the relevance of curriculum tasks to the 'real world' due to its focus on providing evidence and experience of participation in the kinds of activities graduates are likely to encounter in employment (e.g. Pegg et al, 2012; Stein et al, 2014). The analyses presented here, on the other hand, suggest that a higher education concerned with facilitating performance of work would more usefully attend to the means by which graduates might "take hold" of the experiences and situations they encounter, as they seek to identify their own ways forward and take responsibility for the decisions they make in the performance of their work (Barnett, 2007b: 46).

Re-thinking the relationship between higher education and work: towards a higher education for performance

In a world where information is so readily accessible, it is important for universities to clarify how their educational offering differs from that of the other sites that facilitate engagement with and development of different kinds of knowledge (e.g. employment; the internet) (Barnett, 2000a; 2005). One of the challenges the skills-based higher education for employment seeks to address is the difficulty associated with articulating the application of the learning achieved in higher education to other post-university, non-academic environments (e.g. paid employment). The above discussion concluded that a skills-based, employment-focused model is inadequate to this task precisely because it fails to pay attention to the nature and demands of

work performance and working conditions, and the challenges posed by the organisational and employment circumstances in which graduates will be operating.

Performance of the kind of non-standard, discretionary work explored in this thesis is a combination of thinking and acting. In focusing on the content and activities of tasks, a skills-based employment-focused higher education takes little account of the thinking integral to their enactment (e.g. interpretation and clarification of the task; determination of its desired outcome and evaluation of the strategies best suited to achieving this objective) and the dispositions that facilitate their performance (e.g. open-minded rather than insular thinking). As such, it offers inadequate preparation for the challenges graduates are likely to face in the performance of the work explored in this thesis. For example, the skills-based higher education for employment currently championed by policy makers, universities, student groups and businesses determines that the primary purposes of a higher education for work should be to equip students with “up-to-date information and employability skills” (Rees et al, 2007; CBI/UUK, 2009; CBI/NUS, 2011; Ashwin et al, 2015: 616). Equipping students with all the knowledge and skills they will need in the future is itself an impossible task, relying on vague predictions about the future of the economy and advances in knowledge and technology and the implications of these for organisational priorities, job opportunities and work practices. It also misunderstands the role disciplinary knowledge and skill plays in facilitating graduates’ work performance. Despite many working in fields closely associated with the discipline they studied (e.g. law; teaching the subject they studied), few participants felt they drew on much, if any, of the content they engaged with during their undergraduate studies. Of more value was the disciplinary and general understanding of the world (developed through their disciplinary study) that provided the intellectual foundation upon which they could develop, give meaning to and make use of the work-specific subject knowledge that was relevant to their particular role. Although integral to the understanding (e.g. of the world, of their subject) upon which performance of their work was based, participants’ propositional and instrumental knowledge, however up-to-date, made only a partial contribution to their ability to meet the demands of their jobs.

To be better suited to preparing students for the demands of performing rather than just securing work, higher education must take more account of the role thinking plays in informing intelligent action (Pring, 2012). This requires not only an understanding of the propositional and instrumental knowledge upon which this

action might be based (e.g. disciplinary knowledge; strategies for presenting information), but also the ability to develop knowledge (e.g. about the situations encountered) and to make use of these knowledges when seeking to determine the best course of action. It is this utilisation (rather than the possession) of their knowledge about the world and the situations they encounter that enables the participants in this study to take action to achieve positive outcomes in the performance of partially specified tasks in unpredictable and uncertain conditions. For a higher education concerned with preparing students for work, this requires a shift in thinking “from the impersonal (the receiving of the transmitted wisdom of the past) to the personal (the individual making sense of his or her own experiences in light of what the wisdom of the past has to offer)” (Pring, 2012: 758).

Focused on action, the skills-based model of higher education for employment is concerned primarily with the accumulation of the aggregate body of knowledge and skills (e.g. subject knowledge; strategies for communicating) that are presented to students for their passive consumption (McArthur, 2009). This focus on the acquisition of knowledge excludes much, indeed perhaps any, understanding as to the way this knowledge is developed and might be evaluated; yet it is this understanding (or ‘knowledge-of-knowledge’) that enables participants’ utilisation of knowledge and skills in their work. In focusing only on the acquisition of knowledge and skills (i.e. knowledge of existing propositions regarding the way the world *is* understood and action that *should* be taken) the skills-based model offers little opportunity for students to develop their own ways of knowing (i.e. ways of *thinking* about how the world *might* be understood and acted in) (Barnett, 2009). It is only by giving students access to “the backroom ‘to-ing’ and ‘fro-ing’ through which such knowledge develops” that students can “actually pick up, handle, explore knowledge for themselves” and develop an understanding as to the premises upon which knowledge claims are made, and the means by which they might be developed and evaluated (McArthur, 2012: 491).

One of the most commonly cited alternatives to the skills-based employment-focused model of higher education is (a return to) a knowledge-focused higher education that recognises the intrinsic value of disciplinary study (Beck, 2002; Young and Muller, 2013). This is in part likely due to the existing landscape of debate in the field, in which alternatives to the skills-based model seek to challenge the idea that instrumental knowledge is the (only) legitimate outcome of higher education. The contribution this model can make to understanding of the role higher

education might play in preparing graduates for the kinds of work discussed here, however, is limited by its focus on learning *in* higher education, rather than the application *of* higher education to other situations. “Restricted to an ideal realm of thoughts, ideas and concepts”, the knowledge-focused model takes little account of the way “knowing is always situated within a personal, social, historical and cultural setting, and thus transforms from the merely intellectual to something inhabited and enacted” (Dall’Alba and Barnacle, 2007: 682). Critics of knowledge-focused (whether skills or disciplinary-based) models of higher education argue that higher education should be primarily concerned with developing ways of knowing and being, rather than with the acquisition of knowledge per se (Dewey, 1938; Dall’Alba and Barnacle, 2007). This model takes more account of the situated nature of knowledge and the role engagement with (as opposed to possession of) knowledge can play informing students’ personal understanding of themselves and the world, but says little about how this might facilitate purposeful action.

Barnett (2000a; 2000b; 2000c; 2009; 2012: 68) is one of the few authors who has sought to articulate the relationship between the outcomes of his preferred model of higher education and the kinds of challenges graduates might face in their post-university life, arguing that the role of higher education is to help students “come to a position where [they] can prosper in a situation of multiple interpretations”. This position informs his view that:

The educational task is, in principle, not an epistemological task; it is not one of knowledge or even of knowing per se. It is not even one of action... the educational task is primarily an ontological task... of enabling individuals to prosper... amid a situation in which there are not stable descriptions of the world [and] no value systems that can claim one’s allegiance with any unrivalled authority (Barnett, 2012: 69).

While addressing some of the limitations of the skills-based conception of higher education in paying attention to the uncertain conditions of action and the dispositions that might facilitate purposeful activity in this context, this model offers little indication as to the criteria by which one might determine the direction and preferred outcome of this action (Rumble, 2001; Wheelahan, 2005).

Few of the alternatives to the skills-based model of higher education for employment are informed by an empirical analysis of the situations to which the outcomes of higher education might be applied, with most informed by authors’ research within, philosophy on, and/or experience of teaching in higher education. The analyses

presented in this thesis suggest that a higher education concerned with preparing students for the performance of non-standard, discretionary work would seek to deliver a combination of outcomes, developing both the knowledge and ways of thinking, and the dispositions and ways of acting that would help graduates in the performance of these kinds of work. Ideally, this would include development of:

- The breadth of students' propositional and instrumental knowledge (i.e. the disciplinary and general knowledge and strategies upon which they might draw when determining a course and means of action).
- Understanding of the nature and composition of knowledge, its development and the criteria by which it might be evaluated and given meaning and value, and the role ways of knowing (e.g. imagination, observation) can play in helping them to understand themselves, other people and the situations they encounter.
- The kinds of dispositions that might enable them to develop and make use of this knowledge (e.g. intellectual sociability; open-minded rather than insular thinking).
- Students' understanding of their own values, what gives them energy, their most productive ways of thinking and working, and preferred strategies for taking action.

Clarifying the opportunities afforded by an academic higher education

The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely... or equally educative.

J. Dewey, 1938: 25

"Educational institutions... cannot do the whole task of education, and should not be expected to" (Macmurray, 2012: 668): the challenge for universities is to identify the educational tasks and experiences higher education is uniquely placed to perform and provide. This requires greater delineation between different kinds of learning experiences, clarification of the value of these experiences, and better understanding of the opportunities and limitations of the different sites of their provision. Robbins (1963) drew a distinction between broadening the mind and preparation for professional practice, but this distinction has been eroded by the focus of subsequent discussion on employability and employability skills. Yet

research evaluating the success of initiatives designed to improve students' employability suggests that much of the knowledge these university-funded activities seek to supply is more usefully developed through on-the-job work-experience (Cranmer, 2006; Mason et al, 2009; Wilton, 2014). This lack of clarity as to the nature and purpose of the relationship between higher education and work has created confusion as to the role higher education can and should play in preparing students for the challenges of performing particular kinds of jobs. 'Non-graduate' routes into employment through on-the-job training in occupations like law and publishing, for example, are sometimes viewed as alternatives or competitors to the 'traditional' academic experience, despite offering very different kinds of experience (Hancock, 2012; Penguin, 2016).

Some authors have recommended that universities re-direct their attention (and funding) towards increasing the number of opportunities for employment-based training and work placements (Cranmer, 2006; Wakeham, 2016), or securing greater involvement of employers in the design and delivery of courses in order to "[expose] students to employer priorities and decision-making during their studies" (Mason et al, 2009: 23). Such advice assumes that the abilities needed to perform paid work can be and/or are best developed in or informed by employment, and does so primarily because it is focused on, and informed by conceptions of, employability (i.e. securing work) rather than work performance. Yet the analyses of work performance outlined in this thesis indicate that work-experience alone is unlikely to offer adequate preparation for the challenges of non-standard, discretionary work if it is not supplemented with (or preceded by) a learning experience that enables students to develop the thinking abilities, dispositions and practices that facilitate the clarification and interpretation of partially-specified tasks and negotiation of the uncertain and unpredictable conditions of their work and employment³⁰.

The analyses presented in this thesis have described the tensions inherent within the employment relationship, and the way these can be exacerbated by management strategies that erode relationships between colleagues and

³⁰ Universities are not necessarily the only sites in which these capabilities and dispositions might be developed. However, the capabilities themselves are best described as academic in that they are primarily concerned with ways of thinking, theorising, abstraction, and generating and evaluating ideas. Consequently, it is the contention of this thesis that an academic higher education is likely to offer a useful means of developing the kinds of intellectual and social abilities, dispositions and practices conducive to performing the kinds of non-standard, discretionary work performed by the participants in this study.

participants' confidence in their performance. They have also described the way mechanisms of performance management that reward individual achievement, and labour market conditions that demand that individuals take responsibility for their own employability, encourage colleagues to compete rather than collaborate in the pursuit of occupational and financial rewards. Employment, by its very nature, is not a 'safe' or 'free' space in which to test or experiment with ideas or strategies. The focus of employment is the organisation, not the individual. It requires employees to think... but not too much. Employees' continued employment by the organisation is conditional upon their achievement of particular outcomes and demonstration of particular behaviours. Consequently, although experience of employment is important in helping students to become familiar with the processes and practices that structure work performance within organisations (e.g. participating in a business meeting is very different to participating in a seminar or participating in a conversation with friends), its peculiarly insecure nature, the practices that govern the distribution of rewards, the hierarchical structure that mediates collegiate relationships, and the un-equal nature of the employment relationship means it is inimical to the development of the very faculties and dispositions that are of most value when it comes to dealing with the very challenges these conditions create. The condition of employment creates an environment in which decisions are taken under pressure (both in terms of being pressed for time, and being uncertain as to the whether they will deliver the desired outcome) and voicing opinions is inherently risky, despite the fact that these activities are integral to the successful achievement of non-standard, discretionary work tasks and jobs.

As institutions whose primary concern is the pursuit of disciplinary knowledge, universities are necessarily concerned with examining, interrogating and understanding the justifications for and assumptions, values, motivations and criticisms of competing ideas and views³¹. As sites of "collective and continuing inquiry [and] questioning", they are more likely to seek to generate an open-ended discussion of ideas and views than organisations whose priority must be the achievement of different organisational objectives, rewarding interrogation rather than seeking to avoid disagreement (Barnett, 2000a: 27; McArthur, 2011b). Where participation in employment is necessarily concerned with the achievement of

³¹ For the purposes of this discussion, the term university is used to describe the space in which students participate in higher education, rather than the conditions of the university as a business or employer and the employment experiences of university staff (see Archer (2008) for an interesting discussion of the challenges of working in a university as a younger member of academic staff).

organisational objectives, students' participation in higher education can be concerned with their personal intellectual and social development and achievement. The nature of a student's position and participation in education is thus very different to that of an employee's position and participation in employment, where the risks of voicing opinions or challenging other people's views, mismanaging time or tasks, or experimenting with different practices are far greater.

Higher education provides students with opportunities to encounter and engage with some of the challenges of non-standard, discretionary work (e.g. taking and voicing a view, challenging the ideas of others, evaluating and developing strategies for action, prioritising tasks and ideas, engaging in dialogue to clarify their own views and in "common-meaning making" whereby "novel insights are... generated through the interplay of different ideas and perspectives") in a space conducive to their performance and resolution (McArthur, 2009: 120). This offers students the opportunity to develop, practice, experiment with, and reflect on ways of dealing with these challenges in an environment in which the risks of making a mistake are far less and some of the employment conditions that make this work even more challenging (e.g. of demands on effort and time; needing to juggle a large number and variety of tasks and responsibilities; competition between colleagues for rewards or recognition) are removed or mitigated. This "context-independent learning" is valuable not only in creating an environment in which interrogation of ideas, views and practices is encouraged rather than inhibited, but because it goes beyond examination of experience and facilitates imagination of different ways of understanding and progressing it (Young, 2015).

In clarifying the relationship between higher education and work it is equally important to make clear the difference between professional and academic higher education³². When he published his report in the 1960s, Robbins (1963) drew a distinction between an education for broadening the mind and an education for professional practice, but subsequent reports on higher education for employment (e.g. Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010; Wilson, 2012) have tended to conflate the two. Yet there is a difference, for example, between socialisation into the 'ideal' values and practices associated with a particular professional ideology and facilitating students' interpretation of these criteria, development of their personal occupational

³² Again, this is not to suggest that degree courses might not offer a combination of the two, but to clarify their differing purposes.

values, and identification of their preferred ways of working³³. In focusing on a particular kind of occupational work, professional education is primarily concerned with socialisation into particular kinds of practice (e.g. ‘becoming’ an architect, teacher, historian), as well as with the development of occupational knowledge (e.g. de Burgh, 2003; Carr, 2006; Dall’Alba, 2009; Floyd, 2010; Walker, 2012; Hinchcliffe, 2013). However, participants’ narratives indicate that performance of these kinds of work requires the reconciliation of a multiplicity of accounts of work, of which the professional framework advanced by their occupational group is only one. As the distinction made in the Robbins report makes clear, preparation for a particular kind of occupation is not an alternative to an academic higher education; it has different, albeit complementary, priorities and objectives, and both depends and builds on the dispositions and capacities developed through academic study. Where professional education is concerned with preparing students for a particular occupation, the purpose of an academic higher education “is not primarily to produce scientists, or historians, or philosophers, but through the sciences and the humanities... to educate men and women” for the intellectual (and social) challenges they will face in their life and work (Macmurray, 2012: 666).

Conclusion

Drawing on the findings outlined in previous chapters, this discussion has outlined why a skills-based higher education for employment is inadequate to the task of preparing students to meet the challenges of the kinds of non-standard, discretionary work performed by the journalists, teachers and solicitors who participated in this study. In prioritising students’ employability and their socialisation and progression into employment, this model takes little account of the complexity of the situations, tasks and challenges they are likely to encounter in the performance of their work, and the means by which these might be understood and this understanding acted upon. In focusing on skills, it endeavours to equip students with knowledge of the strategies through which they might achieve particular ends, which, although providing a repertoire of concepts, ideas and strategies upon which to draw, offers little guidance as to how graduates might choose to pursue one course of action, or commit to one particular interpretation of their work, over another.

³³ E.g. teachers’ standards (DfE, 2011); journalists’ and solicitors’ codes of conduct (NUJ; 2011; SRA, 2016).

The thinking, theorising, imagination and engagement with the wider world that is so central to the performance of the non-standard, discretionary work performed by the participants in this research is entirely absent from the skills-based employment-focused model of higher education for work that currently dominates university curricula. As such, it is inadequate to the task of preparing students for the challenges of these roles, which include: the management, evaluation and prioritisation of a large number of tasks and volume of information; reconciliation of the multiple, often contradictory, accounts of work upon which they could base their practice; taking responsibility for, ownership of and decisions about work when the freedom with which they might act is limited by constraints of time and a lack of strategic control; and taking purposeful action in conditions of uncertainty. Yet the findings from this study suggest that academic higher education, through disciplinary study, may be uniquely placed to make an important contribution to students' preparation for work by: exposing them to a multiplicity of ideas, values and strategies for understanding and acting in the world; offering them opportunities to further their understanding of knowledge and the different ways of knowing that will facilitate their development and utilisation of their own knowledge; and facilitating their development of the sociable dispositions and confidence that are so central to the performance of non-standard, discretionary work in uncertain and unpredictable conditions. This can only be achieved, however, by rejecting the priorities and focus of a higher education for employment guided by recruiters, and pursuing instead a higher education for performance that focuses on the knowledge and dispositions that will be of most value to students.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

Contribution, limitations and implications

Since higher education has the task of preparing students to be able to call into question the prevailing rules and tools in the world of work, to take on indeterminate job tasks and to be agents of innovation, it has to translate the expectations raised from outside, and must define its own proactive role with regard to the job tasks and the employment patterns of graduates.

U. Teichler, 2000: 91.

The aims of the research

UK higher education policy is underpinned by a conception of higher education for employment that sees work as the application of skills and knowledge, and higher education as the means by which these skills and knowledge are acquired. The evidence upon which this understanding is based is limited, comprising mainly of the accounts of managers or recruiters of organisations that regularly recruit a large number of graduates into their employ. Despite this, higher education institutions have been tasked with improving their graduates' employability by ensuring that students leave university equipped with the skills employers say they look for when seeking to fill graduate roles. As a result, researchers and policymakers have devoted a lot of time to examining the relationship between higher education and the labour market, but very little to exploring the relationship between higher education and the performance of work. The research described in this thesis sought to address this gap by conducting empirical research on the nature and demands of the kinds of non-standard, discretionary work for which a higher education is considered valuable preparation.

The research explored the following principal questions:

- What are the nature and demands of graduates' jobs?
- What shapes, enables and constrains these workers in the performance of their work?

- Does the skills-based employment-focused model of higher education, which governs current understanding of the relationship between higher education and work and the role it can and should play in preparing graduates to meet its demands, offer adequate preparation for these kinds of jobs?

The research explored these questions through qualitative interviews with solicitors, journalists and teachers, and drew on the findings from this empirical research to conduct a critical analysis of the assumptions about the relationship between work and higher education upon which the current conception and practice of this employment-focused higher education are based.

Summary of the findings and conclusions described in this thesis

This study identified a number of features of work common to all three occupations, namely: the unpredictable conditions and uncertain premise of their tasks, the imprecise and incomplete specification of task objectives, and the variable nature of the work process. It found that the execution of participants' tasks is dependent on a combination of unpredictable factors (e.g. events, people) that generate a range of choices for which there is no one fixed or foreseeable answer, which means the end product of the work is inextricably linked to the decisions taken during the course of its production. The unpredictable and variable nature of their tasks means there is uncertainty around the means by which organisational objectives can be achieved. This interpretative space between their employers' organisational objectives and the means and outcome of their work means that participants' own understanding, values, and ambitions play a role in shaping their interpretation of this guidance, but their interpretative freedom is also limited by the circumstances in which they are making these decisions.

Analysis of the conditions of participants' work suggested that organisational control over their practice is "strong [but] shapeless" (Sennett, 1998: 57). It informs their performance by determining the objectives of their work and the criteria for its assessment, while simultaneously bequeathing responsibility for identifying the means by which these objectives are achieved, and these criteria met, to participants themselves. This responsibility includes reconciling the interests of all the individuals and groups who have a stake in their work. The analysis concluded that the differing priorities of the groups to whom participants have obligations limits

their strategic freedom, but the multiplicity of these groups creates a certain amount of space within which they can choose how to reconcile the tensions between them. Consequently the discretion participants have over the performance of their work is more precisely described as operational discretion in the interpretation and realisation of their work objectives, rather than professional or strategic autonomy over the conditions and governance of their work practice.

Examination of participants' work relationships found that collaborating with colleagues is central to managing and mitigating the risks associated with the uncertainty and unpredictability of their work, but that these collective working practices are complicated by mechanisms of performance management and assessment that are underpinned by assumptions of collective accountability (e.g. peer review) yet reward individual achievement (often on the basis of comparisons between colleagues). The tension between participants' individual and collective interests is further exacerbated by their different allegiances within their organisation and to their occupation. It was suggested that reconciling these tensions (and their differing interpretations of organisational issues and occupational priorities) is central to the establishment and maintenance of participants' working relationships, and consequently to the performance of their work.

Analysis of the composition of their jobs found that participants in all three occupations perform a large number of different activities, many of which are not directly related to what might be considered their 'primary' roles of finding news stories, instructing pupils or giving legal advice. However, it was observed that the discretion that comes with this increased responsibility is moderated by the task-based orientation of their employment relationship and the mechanisms by which their employers allocate and organise their work. It was suggested that these inhibit the collective working practices that mitigate the uncertain and unpredictable nature of their work tasks, making participants themselves responsible both for creating time in which to complete their work and for (re)-drawing the boundaries between their work and home lives.

A review of participants' comments on the nature of their employment found that most experienced their employment as open-ended but temporary, despite the majority being employed in permanent roles. It was suggested that participants' concern for, and pursuit of, movement and change in their employment, and their association of personal fulfilment and career success with the achievement of new

or different things, whether roles or experiences, means that even where participants have a clear idea as to where and how they want to proceed in their career, they are keen to maintain the number and range of options available to them, both within and across not only organisations but also occupations and industries. Their narratives suggest that participants consider themselves both free and compelled to construct their own careers, but that the bureaucratic structures and institutional gatekeepers that continue to control access to opportunities and jobs within the labour market limit their autonomy. These employment conditions contribute to a perception that work is necessarily an individual rather than a shared or collective experience as career goals and employment experiences are customised according to the values, preferences and choices of individual participants. These employment conditions further complicate participants' understanding of their responsibilities to themselves and their employers and the reconciliation of these tensions in the performance of their work.

Despite the similarities in the nature and conditions of their work, the analysis also identified significant variation within as well as across occupations, particularly in the composition of participants' jobs and in the way they approached and dealt with the tasks and challenges of their work. It was suggested that this heterogeneity (of participants' personal and occupational values, preferred ways of working, and expectations of and ambitions for their work) is significant not because one particular combination of preferences and ambitions is particularly 'successful', but because it demonstrates how varied graduates' experience and performance of these kinds of operationally discretionary jobs can be.

The analysis concluded that one of the most challenging features of the non-standard, discretionary work performed by journalists, teachers and solicitors is the performance of partially-specified tasks in uncertain and unpredictable conditions, in which the specification and outcomes of tasks and objectives are contestable and of interest to a multiplicity of parties, all of whom have different, often competing, priorities. It is argued that a skills-based conception of work is inadequate to the task of describing the nature and demands of this work because its narrow focus on the content and specification of jobs provides an incomplete picture of participants' work and takes little account of the conditions that inform the nature and outcome of their work tasks, objectives, relationships and practices.

A discussion of the implications of these findings contended that a skills-based employment-focused higher education is inadequate to the task of preparing students to meet the challenges of the kinds of non-standard, discretionary work performed by the participants interviewed for this study. It suggested that the narrow focus of this model (i.e. on equipping students with the employability skills that will secure their progression into employment) takes little account of the complexity of the situations, tasks and challenges graduates are likely to encounter in the performance of this work, and is inimical to the development of the knowledge, confidence and dispositions the analyses presented in this thesis have suggested is central to its successful performance. The discussion concluded by suggesting that higher education remains uniquely placed to make an important contribution to students' preparation for work, but that this potential can only be realised by rejecting the priorities and focus of a higher education for employment guided by recruiters, and pursuing instead a higher education for performance that focuses on the knowledge and dispositions that will be of most value to students.

Contribution to understanding of graduates' work and to the development of a higher education for work

This research generated new empirical data on the nature and conditions of graduates' work, improving understanding of graduates' experiences, performance, understanding and expectations of work, and the demands their work makes of them. The findings facilitated a critical review of the conception(s) of the relationship between higher education and work that currently inform higher education policy. This identified a number of limitations of the concepts currently used to understand and articulate this relationship, and contributed to the imagination of an alternative to the skills- and employability-based conception of higher education for employment.

Findings from the research have:

- Contributed to the development of a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the nature and demands of graduates' work through: furthering understanding of the discretionary nature and uncertain and unpredictable conditions of the work performed by graduate journalists, teachers and solicitors; the identification of a large number and wide variety

of work tasks; generating a more detailed and less simplistic understanding of the interpersonal work required in the performance of these jobs; the identification of a large amount of variation within and across occupations with regard to graduates' experience of and attitude to work, and the strategies individuals employed to manage the demands and challenges of their roles.

- Furthered understanding of the demands this kind of work makes of graduate workers. In particular, the degree to which individuals are responsible (and held accountable) for interpreting and enacting their tasks, managing the boundaries of their jobs, and mitigating the risks associated with the high level of uncertainty and unpredictability in their work.
- Contributed to the identification of several limitations in existing conceptions of the relationship between higher education and work. In particular, the inadequacy of concepts of skill and employability as a means of understanding, exploring and articulating the demands and conditions of these jobs, especially with regard to the interpersonal, interpretative and decision-making work required in these roles. These concepts are currently central to the philosophy underpinning higher education policy in the UK, but their oversimplification of the demands and complexity of intellectual and social tasks has led to a limited conception of higher education (i.e. as a means of and justification for developing one particular kind of graduate) and of the role it can play in preparing students for uncertain and unpredictable work.
- Informed the development of an alternative to the conception of a higher education for employment that integrates insights generated by empirical research on the demands of graduates' work with existing philosophical ideas concerning the purpose and practice of higher education to suggest what an academic higher education designed to facilitate graduates' work performance might usefully include.

Limitations of the study

The accounts of work generated by this research cannot be considered representative of all journalists, teachers or solicitors, nor of all graduates in non-standard, discretionary types of work. The insights this thesis offers regarding identification of the features and demands of work that should be the focus of a

higher education for work, and the ideas it proposes regarding the ways in which these demands might be met, are thus tentative and intended to be suggestive rather than definitive. In making a start on this topic, this study aims to contribute to the development of a research agenda focused on improving understanding of the nature, content, performance and demands of graduates' work, and to the re-imagining of alternatives to the skills-based employment-focused model of higher education for work. This research does not offer a definitive account of graduates' work or the relationship between higher education and work, but has sought to develop some initial propositions and ideas about the demands of graduates' work and the contribution higher education might make to its performance for future research to interrogate, build upon, and make comparisons with.

In focusing on the experiences and views of graduates in three occupations that recruit graduates from a wide variety of disciplines, the research necessarily excluded occupations more closely aligned with a specialist disciplinary or technical knowledge (e.g. engineering, sciences), which may offer a different perspective on the conditions, composition and demands of non-standard, discretionary work. Similarly, in focusing on the kinds of non-standard, discretionary work for which a higher education is commonly believed to be valuable, the research cannot comment on the degree to which the occupants of other kinds of jobs (e.g. those performing so-called 'non-graduate' roles) might face similar or different challenges in their work, nor the contribution an alternative academic higher education of the kind proposed in this thesis (i.e. one focused on preparing students for the challenges of non-standard, discretionary work) may (or may not) make to the performance of other kinds of work.

Implications and suggestions for future research

The insights generated by this research are likely to be of value to policy maker and practitioner as well as academic audiences. The findings from this study indicate that the testimonies of employers are limited in the contribution they can make to understanding of the preparation higher education might offer for the world of work, which means that higher education "must define its own proactive role with regard to the job tasks and the employment patterns of graduates" (Teichler, 2000: 91). It is hoped that the ideas outlined in this thesis might prompt all those centrally concerned with developing policy on, and the practice of, higher education to

reconsider their views on the role higher education might or should play in preparing students for work, and encourage them to further clarify, and draw greater distinctions between, the nature and purpose of the opportunities afforded by different kinds of educational and learning experiences (e.g. academic and professional higher education, work-based learning and work experience placements), rather than seeking to replace or merge one with another. One way of achieving this might be to engage academic teaching staff in discussion about the opportunities afforded by the study and practice of their disciplines for development of the kinds of knowledge, confidence and dispositions outlined in this thesis (rather than to rely on guidance from employers to direct the development of this curricula).

Findings from the empirical research on the demands of graduates' work could be used to inform policy on the purpose and practice of a higher education for work, and might also be of interest to those responsible for curriculum development within higher education institutions. Findings on the challenges graduates face in the performance of their work, and on the variation in the experiences and preferences of graduates within as well as across occupations, could also be used to inform and improve careers information for undergraduate (and postgraduate) students, providing a more complete picture of the opportunities, constraints, challenges and rewards associated with different kinds and conditions of work.

Future research

Findings from this study raise a number of questions about the implications of new technologies and organisational practices for the nature and demands of work, and of the role concerns around employability play in shaping graduates' experience of employment. It also suggests that empirical research on the nature and demands of other aspects of post-university life could make a valuable contribution to understanding of, and debates on, the purpose and value of higher education with regards to graduates' ability to deal with the challenges and activities they face outside paid employment.

- *On graduates' work* – Few studies explore the nature and demands of graduates' work. The research outlined here has sought to address this gap, but remains limited by the small number of occupations it explores. Further empirical research into the nature, content, conditions, performance and demands of graduates' work (exploring 'non-graduate' roles, as well as more

of the occupations associated with the kinds of non-standard, discretionary work explored here) would help to further improve understanding of the demands of graduates' work, and of the contribution a higher education can make to its performance.

- *On the purpose of higher education* – This study has been concerned with the purpose of a higher education for work, but other post-university experiences are deserving of equal attention (e.g. Wolff, 2014). Much of the literature on the purpose and practice of higher education asserts the value of a higher education for citizenship or democratic participation, but there is very little engagement with, or understanding of, the demands of these activities outside of a common-sense understanding of their content and practice. Research that seeks to develop a better understanding of the nature and demands of the kinds of activity for which a higher education is considered valuable could make an important contribution to understanding and articulation (and defence) of the uses to which a higher education might be put.
- *On employability in employment* - This thesis has been critical of the political and institutional focus on employability and the way the topic of employability has dominated the research agenda, but graduates' expectations of, and experience in, the labour market remains an important topic of research. Although not the focus of this research, concerns around employability were found to play an important role in shaping participants' expectations of, and attitude towards, their current role, which contributed to their understanding of the purpose of their job and their performance of their work. Expanding research on graduate employability to include analysis of graduates' concern for, and experience of, maintaining their employability within employment would make a valuable addition to this literature, while also contributing to understanding of the demands of graduates' work.
- *On the implications of new technologies for job composition* - There is a great deal of concern regarding the role new technologies are playing in re-shaping 'professional' work. These discussions have focused primarily on the role new technologies have played in making employees more available, on the on-going debate about the implications of new technologies for the development or eradication of particular types of job in the future, and on the

role these developments have played, or might play, in making jobs redundant. However, the findings from this study suggest that it would also be useful to conduct more research into the impact these redundancies are having on the jobs that remain. For example, where previously a solicitor may have communicated with a client by dictating a letter to their secretary, now they often draft their own communications and send them directly to their clients via email. Similarly, they are increasingly held directly responsible for a greater proportion of the work that they are involved in (e.g. clients will contact them directly, rather than going through a more senior colleague or other gatekeeper), as new technologies have made them both more visible and more easily accessible. As these extra tasks (some associated with more senior roles, some with more junior ones) are subsumed into the solicitor's role, so the number and variety of their activities and responsibilities increases, making further demands on their time, energy and attention. Further research into the impact of these changes on experience and practice of work, and of their implications for work time and organisation, and job composition would offer valuable insight into the nature and demands of contemporary work.

- *On the conception of work tasks as integral or supplementary to the performance of jobs* – This research found that, in addition to the activities they are required to perform in the execution of their work tasks, many participants also engaged in activities that they described as supplementary to their paid work, yet essential to the performance of their job and/or the maintenance and progression of their employment. These activities were often performed after work or at home due to time constraints during the working day. This raises questions as to if and/or how tasks are being (re)-configured by employers and employees with regard to understanding as to the primary beneficiaries of these activities (i.e. the role they play in improving the employability of the individual relative to the contribution they make to the performance of the work for which these individuals are being employed), and the implications of this for understanding of the performance of these activities (i.e. who is responsible for making time for these activities? Are activities that might previously have been considered integral to a role (e.g. keeping up to date with current affairs) increasingly regarded as tasks employees should perform in their own time?). Research exploring the times at which different kinds of tasks are commonly being performed

might offer interesting insight into the (changing) nature of job composition, and the relationship between work tasks and time.

Concluding remarks

Paid work is an important (and large) part of many graduates' lives, and one of the main ways they will participate in, and contribute to, society. In looking beyond the narrow definitions of employment, skills and productivity that have so far dominated the debate about the relationship between higher education and work, this thesis has tried to show that research on the nature and demands of work, and of graduates' experience of performing it, can make a valuable contribution to understanding of the role higher education can play in preparing students for some of the opportunities and challenges they will face in their post-university life.

Appendix 1: Composition of the sample

Teachers

Subject ³⁴	School	Mixed/ Single Sex	Ofsted Rating	Intake ³⁵
Languages	Comprehensive	Mixed	Good	Disadvantaged
English	Grammar	Single sex	Outstanding	Advantaged
Maths and Science	Independent	Single sex	n/a	n/a
Humanities	Independent	Single sex	n/a	n/a
Maths and Science	Grammar	Single sex	Outstanding	Advantaged
Languages	Comprehensive	Mixed	Good	Average
Humanities	Independent	Mixed	n/a	n/a
Humanities	Comprehensive	Mixed	Good	Average
English	Comprehensive	Mixed	n/a	Average
Maths and Science	Independent	Single sex	n/a	n/a
Humanities	Independent	Mixed	n/a	n/a
Humanities	Comprehensive	Mixed	Requires Improvement	Disadvantaged
Art and Design	Comprehensive	Mixed	Good	Disadvantaged
English	Comprehensive	Single sex	Outstanding	Advantaged
Languages	Comprehensive	Mixed	Good	Disadvantaged

³⁴ **Humanities** includes: Geography, History, Religious Studies, Philosophy; **Maths and Science** includes: Maths, Biology, Physics, Chemistry; **Languages** includes: French, Spanish, German.

³⁵ **Disadvantaged**: higher than average number of pupils eligible for additional financial support/free school meals (i.e. serves a more socially and economically disadvantaged catchment area/pupil population); **Advantaged**: lower than average number of pupils eligible for additional financial support/free school meals; **Average**: average number of pupils eligible for additional financial support/free school meals.

English	Comprehensive	Mixed	Special Measures	Disadvantaged
Maths and Science	Independent	Single sex	n/a	n/a

Journalists

Medium	Staff or Freelance	Specialism	Audience	Features
Broadcast	Staff	Daily news	Local Regional	Radio
Print/Web	Staff	Opinion Features	National	Broadsheet
Print	Freelance	Features	Local National	Also a photo-journalist
Print	Staff	Investigative	Local National	
Broadcast	Staff	Politics Current affairs	Regional National	Radio and TV
Broadcast	Freelance	Daily news	Local Regional	Radio
Broadcast	Freelance/ Staff	News Documentaries	National	Radio and TV
News Agency	Staff	News Business	National Global	Newswire
Broadcast	Freelance/ Staff	Health Current affairs	Local National	TV
Broadcast	Staff	Daily news	Local Regional	Radio
Print	Freelance	Features	Local National	Broadsheet/ Tabloid
Print	Freelance	Features	Local National	Broadsheet/ Tabloid
Print	Staff	Business	Local Regional	Also an editor
Print/Web	Staff	Technology	National Global	Specialist/ Trade
Print/Web	Staff	Science	National Global	Specialist/ Trade

Solicitors

Field or Specialism ³⁶	Clients	Firm	Special features
Private client	Private individuals	Medium-sized Commercial	
Commercial	Businesses (large and small)	Large Commercial	European and International law
Private client	Private individuals	Medium-sized Commercial	
Charity law	Businesses (large and small)	Medium-sized Commercial	
Property	Businesses and private individuals	Large Commercial	
Education and Social Services	Private individuals	Charity	Some remote working Legal aid
Insolvency	Businesses (large and small)	Medium-sized Commercial	
Commercial	Businesses (large)	Global Commercial	European and International law
Commercial	Businesses	Global Commercial	
Criminal	Private individuals	Medium-sized Commercial	Legal aid
Commercial	Businesses (large)	Global Commercial	
Family	Private individuals	Large Commercial	
Property	Businesses (large)	Large Commercial	
Private client	Private individuals	Medium-sized Commercial	Specialising in tax
Education and Social Services	Private individuals	Charity	Legal aid
Science and Technology	Employer	In-house	

³⁶ **Commercial** includes mergers and acquisitions, finance, tax, trademarks; **Property** includes construction and real estate; **Private client** includes wills, estate planning, Court of Protection work; **Education and Social Services** includes housing.

Appendix 2: Example of an email approaching a potential participant

Dear W

I'm currently studying for a PhD in the Department of Social Sciences at Cardiff University where I'm exploring the nature of the work performed by journalists, solicitors and teachers and asking how experience of higher education might help to prepare people for these kinds of roles.

I understand that you are currently an X at Y, and I was wondering if you might be able to help with my research? I'm conducting interviews with journalists in different fields and roles to find out more about the nature and demands of their particular type of work, and I'd be really interested in hearing about your experiences as an X journalist specialising in Y reporting, particularly your reflections on Z.

The interview itself would be very informal (e.g. over a coffee) and wouldn't take much more than an hour as I try not to take up too much of your time. Some topics for discussion might include: your views on the purpose of a journalist, your day-to-day work (e.g. talking through your tasks), and your thoughts on the kinds of skills and abilities journalists need to perform this kind of work.

I'd be very happy to meet wherever and whenever would be most convenient for you, whether that would be at your office during the day, or in a coffee shop at lunchtime or after work. All interviews are completely confidential, and neither you nor your current (or previous) employers would be identified in any research reports, theses etc.

If you think you might have time to meet with me I would be really grateful if you could let me know so I can arrange a time to visit you.

If you would like any further information or have any questions you would like answered before you decide whether or not to participate please don't hesitate to contact me - my email address is higginsh@cardiff.ac.uk.

Many thanks.

Best wishes

Holly Higgins
PhD Researcher, Cardiff University

Appendix 3: Example of an email clarifying the purpose of the research in response to a query from a participant

Hi X

Thank you very much for responding to my email and for your question³⁷.

My research is concerned with the relationship between higher education and work. Much of the research on graduates' post-university experience is concerned with their transition into employment or their 'employability' (e.g. traits, skills, credentials that enable them to find and maintain employment), but there has been very little empirical research into what graduates actually do in work (in terms of the content of their jobs and the conditions in which they work e.g. their tasks, how their work is organised, who manages their work, if they work independently or collaboratively etc.).

Since the 1980s higher education policies have increasingly pursued a 'skills agenda', which aims to create closer ties between students' experiences at university and the demands of work. There has been quite a lot of criticism of these policies, but this criticism tends to be philosophical rather than empirical (e.g. criticising the idea that higher education should prepare people for work, rather than the means by which institutions are choosing to do it). I'm interested in evaluating the skills-based conception of higher education on its own merits (i.e. asking whether the assumptions about work upon which this idea of higher education is based are actually reliable), so I'm interviewing graduates who are working in three occupations for which higher education is often considered to be valuable in order to generate data on the nature and demands of their work which will enable me to evaluate these assumptions. (The occupations I'm interested in are often described as 'knowledge' or 'professional' occupations, but those are quite slippery terms when it comes to defining what they actually do!).

Most of the empirical data on the demands of work tends to come from recruiters and managers, whereas I'm interested in the views of the people who are actually performing the work. The aim of the interviews is to generate data that will enable me to identify some key features of these jobs and any points of similarity or difference in participants' experiences of performing them, and to use these findings to explore the kinds of intellectual and social demands these roles make of the people performing them.

I hope that is helpful? Please let me know if you have any further questions. If you decide you would like to participate please let me know, but I completely understand if you would prefer not to

Many thanks again for your email.

Best wishes

Holly

³⁷ The query asked for further clarification as to what I was trying to find out and why.

Appendix 4: Information sheet outlining the research

Research study exploring the nature of work

Participant information sheet

Before you decide whether or not to take part in this study, please read the information below. It explains what the research is about, and what participating in the interviews will involve.

What is the research about?

I am exploring the nature of the work performed by solicitors, secondary school teachers and journalists in order to understand a) what their work entails, and b) how experience of higher education might help them to perform this kind of work.

As part of the study, I would like to meet people who have been working in these occupations for around 2 or more years, to discuss their work and their experience of becoming a teacher, journalist or solicitor.

Who is conducting and funding the research?

My name is Holly Higgins and I am a PhD student at the School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University. My research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Background to the research

Despite widespread use of the term, there is no agreed definition of a 'graduate job'. Often used as short-hand for particular types of occupation (e.g. higher status jobs, jobs which recruit students through graduate training schemes), the term is primarily used to describe roles in which it is expected that the person performing the work will be educated to degree-level, rather than to describe roles where experience of higher education is integral to an individual's ability to perform the work.

Few studies explore graduates' experiences post-graduation, and those that do tend to focus on graduates' experience of finding and maintaining employment, or on 'skill utilisation' (the extent to which graduates in work are making use of the skills

they developed at university). This study takes a different approach, asking what it is about a particular type of work that might require the person performing it to be educated to degree level.

Why teachers, journalists and solicitors?

There is a general consensus around the kinds of jobs graduates might be expected to progress into once they complete their university education. Teaching, law and journalism are regularly cited as classic examples of occupations that deal with the kinds of abstract problems and non-standard tasks that require independently minded, creative, and highly educated workers.

However, while some researchers have started to explore how advances in technology and new management practices are re-shaping the nature of work in these fields, few are exploring the impact the nature of this work might have on the role higher education plays in preparing graduates for these roles.

Why would the researcher like to talk to me?

I would like to get a feel for what it is like to work as a solicitor, teacher or journalist in a variety of different settings and circumstances, so would welcome participants from a range of backgrounds, including those who are: employed on short-term or permanent contracts; self-employed or freelance; working for small or medium-sized organisations or firms; working for large or multi-national organisations or firms; working for rural or city schools; working in the public or private sector.

Why is this research important?

I am interested in this topic because I think we need a better understanding of the nature of graduates' work. Many people have expressed concern about the societal and personal costs of going to university, and this research aims to understand what people working in three different occupations actually do in order to examine how higher education might help people perform this kind of work.

I hope that the findings will offer guidance to both higher education policy makers and to the next generation of students.

What would the interview involve?

If you think you might be able to help, I'd be grateful if you could get in touch with me so I can arrange to visit you. The interview would be really informal (e.g. over coffee) and wouldn't take more than an hour, as I don't want to take up too much of your time. It would be an informal discussion about your current job and your experiences of work, so you wouldn't need to do anything to prepare for it. I'm travelling around the country to meet people, so can easily meet wherever and whenever is most convenient for you.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary, and if you decide you no longer wish to participate you are free to withdraw at any time and there is no need to give a reason for your withdrawal.

What happens to the information?

I would like to record the interviews on a digital sound recorder so I can listen to them again after the interview. I will also be transcribing the recordings myself. All interviews will be treated as confidential and only I (and my two supervisors) will have access to the recordings and the transcripts.

When I'm reporting on the findings (e.g. in my PhD thesis or in journal articles), no individual or organisation will be identified, and all names will be changed.

How do I participate in the study?

If you would like to participate in the study, please email Holly Higgins at higginsh@cardiff.ac.uk.

Further information and contact details:

- To contact my supervisors, please email Phillip Brown at brownp1@cf.ac.uk.
- Find out more about Cardiff University at www.cardiff.ac.uk.
- Find out more about the Economic and Social Research Council at www.esrc.ac.uk.

Appendix 5: Form used to confirm participant consented to participating in an interview and having the interview recorded.

Researcher: Holly Higgins

**Exploring the nature of graduates' work
Participant consent form**

I agree to take part in an interview for this study.

I understand that:

- I am free to withdraw at any time and do not need to give a reason for my withdrawal.
- The interview will be recorded.
- Only the researcher and her two supervisors will have access to the recording.

Name of participant:.....

Signature of participant:

Date:

Appendix 6: Interview topic guide (journalists)

Introduction (Researcher)

- Overview of project (i.e. research questions, focus, kinds of topics)
- Their participation (i.e. confidentiality, anonymity, right to withdraw)
- Consent to record the interview (form)
- Confirmation: regarding role, employer etc.

Topics to discuss

Career history

- **Can you tell me how you became a journalist?**

Purpose

- **What is the purpose or the aim of a journalist?** If you had to describe the role to someone, how would you describe it?

Description

- **Can you describe your job to me?** (e.g. tasks etc.)
- What determines what you do?
- What determines when you do it?

Tasks in more detail (drawing on examples given in description of work)

- **Can you talk me through an example of X** (e.g. a story you worked on recently)

Tools

- **Do you have any tools to help you in your work?** (E.g. computer software; templates; social media)

People

- **Who do you interact with in your work?** (e.g. colleagues, sources, managers)

- Can you describe the relationship/interaction? (e.g. pitching ideas, guidance, direction)
- Colleagues (independent /collaborative working?)
- Managers (hands on/hands off? Provision of direction/feedback?)

Organising work

- **What does your working day look like?**
- How is your time organised? (How and by whom – imposed/negotiated/self-directed?)
- How is work allocated/divided up? (How and by whom?)

Knowledge and capabilities

- **What do you think makes the ‘ideal’ journalist?**
- What do you think it’s important to know/be able to do?

Developing those capabilities

- How have you learned to be a journalist? What kinds of experiences do you think helped you to become the journalist you are today?

Pros and cons

- What do you find challenging about your job?
- What do you most enjoy?

Career

- **Do you think you’ll stay in this job/occupation?**

To end

- **Is there anything else you think I should take into account that we haven’t already covered?**

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