Working and Learning Lives

Springboard Student Experiences

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed:

ID No.: 12211721

Date:

Dedication

I dedicate this work to Aunt Evangeline

(Evangeline Ganter 1926 – 2012)

who provided love, support and motivation

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the research participants for sharing their time and experience generously for this study. Thanks to Dr. Gerry McNamara, for his steady hand and good humour. Many thanks to my colleagues and critical friends, Dr. Áine Furlong and Helen Arthur for taking the time to read early drafts and engage in discussion that helped to shape the direction of the work. Thank you to Jane Brennan for her literary insight. A heartfelt thanks to my good friend Dr. Úna Kealy for her invaluable feedback on a later draft.

As a participant said of her study journey, this was not a solo trip. Many thanks to my husband, parents and family for all the practical support that allowed me time at the desk. The work does not just belong to me but with much love, to Donagh and our children Joe, Seán, Anna and David.

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Word Count: 48, 984

List of Abbreviations

CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCU	Dublin City University
EGF	European Globalisation Adjustment Fund
EGFSN	Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institutes
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
LED	Lived Experience Description
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SCCT	Social Cognitive Career Theory
SLMRU	Skills and Labour Market Research Unit
WIT	Waterford Institute of Technology

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Abstract

Fionnuala Brennan

Working and Learning Lives: Springboard Student Experiences

This research examines the experience of mature students on work placement as part of Information and Communications Technology programmes at Waterford Institute of Technology. Participants have availed of free college places through the government funded Springboard initiative, which has as its aim to support unemployed people to return to the paid work force. A phenomenological approach is taken in the data gathering, analysis and presentation. Fourteen interviews were carried out, with seven men and seven women between 2015 and 2016. The phenomenon is embedded in the broader experience of the period in Ireland and in particular the experience of the South-East region.

Five themes emerge and a model entitled *Meaning-Making in Work Transitions* is presented to accommodate these. The first is the situated nature of participant experience within their own personal context. This context includes wider society and economy, but also participants' cultural, social and personal lives. Secondly, participants demonstrate the will and ability to reinvent themselves which is represented under the theme of adaptability. Third, work decisions for participants are taken in the context of their personal relationships which falls under the theme of relationality. The fourth theme is narratability which represents how participants create a coherent working identity, including accommodating change and transition, in the telling of their working life. The fifth and final theme is at the centre of the work transition experience, and that is meaning-making. Participants demonstrate the desire to find work that aligns with a sense of self, and allows a sense of purpose and meaning.

This research adds to the developing work of Blustein (2011), Savickas (2013) and Savickas et al. (2009) in an emerging career theory for a globalised economy. Participant experience points to the value of continued funded opportunities, beyond the economic imperative for national recovery, for mature learners seeking to make a change in career.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Research Background

This research looks at the work placement experience of Springboard cohorts. The Springboard initiative was introduced in 2011 and is aimed at 'jobseekers with a previous history of employment' (springboardcourses.ie, 2016). Funded college programmes are offered to jobseekers in the areas of 'skills gap needs' as identified through research conducted by the state agency Forfás. The scheme has as its overarching aim, to get unemployed people back into the paid workforce. Cohorts presenting for Springboard funded programmes differ to those on undergraduate programmes, where so called 'life-long learners', or mature students, are in the minority. Within the Springboard programme all participants are mature learners with experience of the workplace. For those working in higher education (HE) looking to support these cohorts, it is apparent that the profile, experience and needs of Springboard groups differ to that of other groups.

The aim of this research is to examine what it is like for mature learners on accredited work placement programmes, in order to understand their experience. This is of use to government and the HE sector in considering approaches to mature learner initiatives, and provision of supports to mature learners while at college and on placement. It adds to the statistical data garnered from Springboard graduates, which rates satisfaction and re-employment rates (e.g. HEA 2012; HEA 2015a) and offers insights into the personal challenges and opportunities experienced by those reskilling to adapt to a changing workplace. The approach taken is phenomenological, and so the research question asks 'what is it like to be on work placement as a mature intern?'

1.2 Rationale for the Study

Insightful quantitative data-sets have been generated by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) researching the Springboard experience, and this study adds to that knowledge by offering a qualitative perspective on the participants' motivations, values and experiences. Participants in the research, seven men and seven women, are completing, or have completed work placement modules as part of a programme of study under the Springboard initiative. The college courses undertaken by the participants are Springboard funded information and communications technology conversion programmes on offer at Waterford

Institute of Technology (WIT) during the period 2014 - 2016. These are a Diploma in Security and Forensics and the Higher Diploma in Business Systems Analysis.

The motivation for the research came from my experience of working on these modules with Springboard groups. I worked with cohorts for three semesters from 2014 to 2015 delivering a module in Professional Development which includes preparation for work placement. The research participants share the experience of returning to college as mature people to reskill in order to find work. They hold previous qualifications, for the most part in either business and finance (ten participants) but also in engineering (3 participants) and nursing (1 participant). All participants spent time in the workforce prior to a redundancy, or leaving paid employment due to health or family reasons. Half of those interviewed spent time living and working outside of the region, and then relocated back to Waterford for family reasons. Either as a result of the recession, or the profile of work available in the region, participants found it necessary to adapt their skillset to gain employment. Participant profiles will be further outlined in section 2.7.

For myself, on leaving school I gained a degree in Communication Studies and spent approximately fifteen years in project management in the cultural sector. This work was mainly Dublin-based on theatre and festival projects, with some touring abroad. Between the age of 28 and 36 I had four children. When I was 32 my husband & I relocated home to Waterford. I began lecturing in my mid-thirties, and initially my work was with music, art and design undergraduates and on a taught Masters in Arts & Heritage Management. This work included professional development modules, which aimed to support graduates in the pursuit of sustainable careers in the creative sector. In more recent times I have delivered professional development modules in computing. From my own personal work history and my experience of working with creative cohorts, I developed an interest in career choice and adaptability. Graduates of creative and performing arts are vocationally committed to their work and, by the nature of the creative industries, are required to create and recreate their own work opportunities throughout their working lives. I have been interested to see how other cohorts create opportunities in the context of change.

The cohorts on Springboard programmes are mature and highly motivated. For me, the experience of working with them differed from work on similar modules with younger cohorts on undergraduate programmes. As outlined in Chapter 2, the age profile is older

and all participants have experience of the workplace (HEA 2014a). They bring a confidence, focus and work ethic to the group, which emerges in the themes in Chapter 6. All of this contributes to an engaged and challenging classroom environment. My motivation was to improve understanding of the experience of this group, so as to improve HE support for mature cohorts.

It is likely that mature participants on other programmes, for example on Master's in Business Administration (MBA) programmes, are similar to Springboard cohorts in that they are reskilling to improve their work prospects. However, the Springboard experience differs in that all participants in the study have experienced a crisis in their working lives, have spent time out of the paid workforce, and are coming back to college with the objective of gaining employment. The experience is embedded in the wider context of the recessionary period in Ireland and in particular the South-East region between 2008 and 2016. The personal experience of this group reflects the wider experience of the region, which is going through a phase of transition, attempting to move from a reliance on a diminishing manufacturing sector to developing employment in emerging technologies. An improved understanding of the experience of career reskilling can contribute to how HE and work placement supports the government objective to maintain 'the talent and flexibility of our workforce' (Department of Education and Skills, 2014, p. 3).

1.3 Background & Context

The context of the participant experience includes the wider economic background of the South-East region. Government responses to unemployment are outlined and the rationale behind information and communications technology (ICT) reskilling programmes is examined. For many Springboard participants nationally, their previous employment does not match current skills demands and so they are returning to college in order to gain new skills to improve their chances of finding paid work. The HEA has provided statistical analysis of participant outcomes from Springboard, and programme completion and re-employment rates are presented here. One of the aims of Springboard is to contribute to the government objective of increasing the number of Information and Computer Technology (ICT) graduates nationally by 100% between 2011 and 2018 (HEA 2014a). ICT programmes are offered at NFQ levels 6, 7, 8 and 9 across public and private HE institutions nationally, and range from introductory ICT skills conversion programmes at level 6, to specialised software

programming courses at level 9. Springboard participant profiles and programme outcomes are outlined.

1.4 Emerging Career Theory

In the literature review, the research places the experience of this cohort within the context of career theory more broadly, and specifically within the context of an emerging social constructionist perspective of careers and working (e.g. Richardson 2002, 2012; Young and Collin 2003; Blustein, Schultheiss and Flum 2004; Savickas et al. 2009). At the outset of the research process, the literature search focused on career theory and identity. The tension and dynamic between structure and agency is examined – structure being a broad concept encompassing our custom and practice in any given social context but also extending to economic structures, gender and familial structures, and agency referring to the autonomy and choice we exercise within our given structures.

Consistent with Heidegger and social constructionism, the study takes the view that individuals have possibilities in their working lives, but that those possibilities can be chosen, stumbled upon, or we may have grown up with them. Possibilities in the world of work are always embedded in context. This context is the first theme to be examined in the literature review. Through data analysis, further themes emerge and these are integrated into Chapter 3. They are: adaptable activity - participants change and reinvent themselves for a changing workplace market; relationality - participants' work lives and work relationships, personal lives and personal relationships are all interwoven; and narratability - participants create their work biography through the telling of it. At the centre, where these themes intersect is the fifth and final theme of meaning-making. Participants are looking for work that allows purpose and meaning, in addition to economic reward. A *Model of Meaning-Making in Work Transitions* is proposed at the end of the literature review to represent this process of meaning-making in our working lives.

1.5 Methodology

The study takes a phenomenological approach and both the philosophy and the practical application of the approach is discussed in Chapter 4. Phenomenology looks to examine a given experience, in this case, the mature person's return to the workplace via an internship, and in examining it, provide insight into what makes this experience unique of itself. It is not then an attempt to give voice to individual experience, but rather to find what commonality,

or essence of experience, was shared by the participants within the study. Qualitative interviews were conducted with participants. Where stories or anecdote emerge in the data, these are presented and analysed in Chapter 5 using an approach outlined by Van Manen (1997, 2014). For the remainder of the data, an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith & Osborne 2008, Smith et al 2009) procedure was applied. Through identifying emerging themes in the data, and corresponding themes in the literature, five key elements of the participant experience are identified and presented in the model of *Meaning-Making in Work Transitions*. This model is used for a thematic analysis in Chapter 6.

1.6 Findings

Participants have relatively high levels of personal capital, all but one participant is Irish born, so for the majority, they have high cultural capital, they are familiar with navigating the system of work and education in Ireland. All participants are educated to third level and have experience of the working world. In addition, participants describe supportive family and peer networks. However, the scope that participants demonstrate in redirecting and redefining their career path is limited, in the first place, by the context of opportunities in a region that is economically challenged. Secondly, contrary to what traditional career frameworks suggest, participants are not exploring and making career decisions as autonomous individuals. Their personal relationships beyond work play an integral part in career mapping and participants make significant life and work decisions based on familial obligations. Furthermore, relational culture within the workplace i.e. the habits and ways of interacting, is of importance to participants in career decision-making in addition to the task or work they undertake.

Participants describe on the one hand situations at work where their sense of themselves in the world and their experience in the workplace were misaligned, and on the other hand situations where their experience reaffirmed their sense of themselves and promoted a sense of well-being and purpose. Participants demonstrate self-awareness and reflexive capacity to prioritise their needs in a work environment. While theoretical frameworks examined within the career literature touch at times on purpose and meaning, the placing of meaning-making at the centre of our working lives necessitated broadening the scope of literature included and led to the development of the *Model of Meaning-Making in Work Transitions*, integrating insights gained through data analysis. This draws on emerging career theory notably Savickas et al. (2009) and Blustein (2011) but differs in that it places meaning-making at the centre of the process.

Consistent with the phenomenological approach and in order to illustrate the complexity of experience on placement, findings are presented through participant stories, or Lived Experience Descriptions (LEDs) (Van Manen 2014). These are anecdotes from the placement experience, and are analysed using the five existentials espoused by Van Manen (2014), that is the different ways in which we experience the world. The existentials are 'lived self/other (relationality), lived body (corporeality), lived space (spatiality), lived time (temporality), and lived things and technology (materiality)' (Van Manen 2014, p. 302). Stories from literature are integrated in to the analysis in order to lend an immediacy to the reader's understanding. This is outlined further in section 4.5. Following analysis of the LEDs, and participants' reflections on those and other experiences, themes emerge which contribute to the creation of the model.

The element where the research originated, looking at the experience of Springboard cohorts who are responding in an adaptable way to a crisis in their working lives, represents one circle in the framework - that of adaptable activity. Participants have successfully made their way back to college, availing of free places and accessing support e.g. childcare and income supports, as well as academic supports, in order to complete their modules. Springboard completion rates have varied widely at WIT with 45% of students completing in 2011, rising to 75% of students completing in 2014 (HEA 2016). With a failure rate as high as more than one in two, it is obvious that the participants included in this study could be considered the winners of the initiative. In the first instance they have identified programmes of study, applied for and been offered places. They have sufficient supports to avail of those places and engage with their studies. They have successfully completed the taught elements of their programmes, and have secured work placement opportunities. In all of this activity they demonstrate an openness and ability to adapt.

The second circle of the framework is narratability, the telling of the career story. The phenomenological approach taken is hermeneutic, and so not just the experience, but the telling of it, is of interest. Career story is constructed and reconstructed in the telling of it in interview and overlaps too with adaptable activity, in that participants demonstrate the ability to tell a new identity into being. The third circle which comes to the fore is relationality. The interdependent nature of participants' personal and working lives becomes clear. Family dynamics beyond the workplace, including the role of unpaid work

undertaken in caring for others at different stages of life, are woven into career stories. In addition, relationality within the workplace emerges as playing a significant role in determining a sense of community and meaning for participants.

1.7 Conclusion

The study contributes to an understanding of the experience of mature learners, specifically those who have experienced disruption in their working lives and are returning to college with the aim of re-entering the work force. In so doing it can inform how those in HE engage with and support these cohorts in a HE context. The study affirms the continued relevance of the Springboard initiative which facilitates career change. It is apparent that participants are anxious not only to gain paid employment, but to undertake work that holds purpose and meaning for them. Government describes Springboard as a 'focused labour market activation programme' (p. 24) and states that 'as we achieve the ambition set out in Enterprise 2025, the demand over time for these initiatives will likely reduce' (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2015, p.22). This indicates that the initiative is driven from an economic imperative, and as employment figures improve, the need for paid college places for mature applicants will diminish.

However, the incentive for participants in the study to reskill and reimagine their working selves is only partially economic. They are looking for opportunities that are purposeful and meaningful to them. The current government ICT Skills Action Plan posits that 'Ireland is part of a global race for talent' and our competitiveness in that race depends on the 'quality of our workforce' (Department of Education and Skills, 2014, p. 3). Opportunities such as Springboard enhance the development of a workforce that is ready to reinvent itself, so that this can contribute to the development of the South-East region more broadly. The imperative for this extends beyond the economic recession.

Chapter 2 - Background and Context

2.1 Introduction

Many aspects of literature are relevant to the study at hand and will be examined in the following two chapters, including that on work placement and career theory. In this chapter, the context of the experience under study is outlined, which begins with the economic background of Ireland over the past twenty years, and more specifically the challenges faced by the city of Waterford and its region. Government initiatives used to stimulate employment and development are presented and the role of education in these initiatives discussed. Specifically, the purpose of the Springboard initiative, offering free places on HE courses, and the integration of a work placement element as part of those courses, are outlined and the available statistics on student completion and re-employment rates analysed.

2.2 Economic Background

The Irish economy experienced unprecedented growth during the 1990s and early 2000s. Employment nationally, which measures the percentage of the population aged 15 – 64 in paid work, 'reached 70% at the peak of the employment boom' in early 2008. The economic crisis became apparent by late 2008, and employment began to fall, and continued until it reached a low point of 53% in early 2012. By late 2015 employment had recovered to 63.8% (Department of Social Protection 2016, p.6). Looking at unemployment figures, which take account of those on the live register, unemployment peaked at over 15% nationally in 2012, and by early 2016 had recovered to 8.8% (Department of Social Protection 2016, online).

The experience of Waterford and the South-East region shares some commonalities with the broader Irish experience, in that it experienced population growth over the past thirty years, employment growth from the nineties, and a decline in employment from the mid- 2000s. Emigration is part of the population and employment picture over the same period. Over 200,000 (net) left Ireland in the 1980s – 'with the majority leaving in the latter part of the decade as Ireland remained in recession whilst other countries recovered' (Glynn, Kelly and MacÉinrí 2013, p2-3). Previously, emigration peaked at over 70,000 in 1989. MacÉinrí notes (in Kenny 2015) that about 50% of those who left in the 1980s returned to Ireland. He asserts that 'life stage factors play a huge role in the decision to return or stay abroad'. 'Once people reach their mid-30s their professional and familial and social circles are more embedded, and the likelihood of return after that age diminishes quite rapidly. Once their kids start in school, often that's it' (online).

Waterford's growth was largely industrial in the 1970s through to the 1990s with an increase of manufacturing plants and ancillary service provision in the city. In tandem the city and county experienced a population growth during this time. Despite the economic downturn since 2008, the population growth has continued, since 1986 the population of the city has grown by 33% and the county by almost 30% (CSO 2015). Historically the city was an important trading port being Ireland's closest deep water harbour to Europe, having its commercial heyday in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In more recent times the city has been reliant on manufacturing industry both indigenous, such as the local foundry and Waterford Crystal, and foreign investment such as Milton Bradley Games (now Cartimundi), which established in Waterford in 1977 and Bausch and Lomb, an American eye-care manufacturer which established in Waterford in 1980.

The indigenous industry of key significance in the region was Waterford Crystal. Crystal manufacturing had existed in Waterford from 1783 to 1851, and was re-established in 1947, enjoying very high demand internationally but particularly in the US, through the 1950s and 60s. When a new manufacturing plant was established in Waterford City in 1970 it was the largest of its kind in the world (Waterfordvisitorcentre.com) and a second plant was opened in the early 70s in Dungarvan in the west of the county. 'Waterford Crystal was once among the most envied employers in the entire country, fuelling much of the local economy during its peak years with thousands on its payroll and the coveted pieces of glass making their way into homes around the world' (Kane 2014). A prosperous working class population was supported by Waterford Crystal as well as by foreign investment industries.

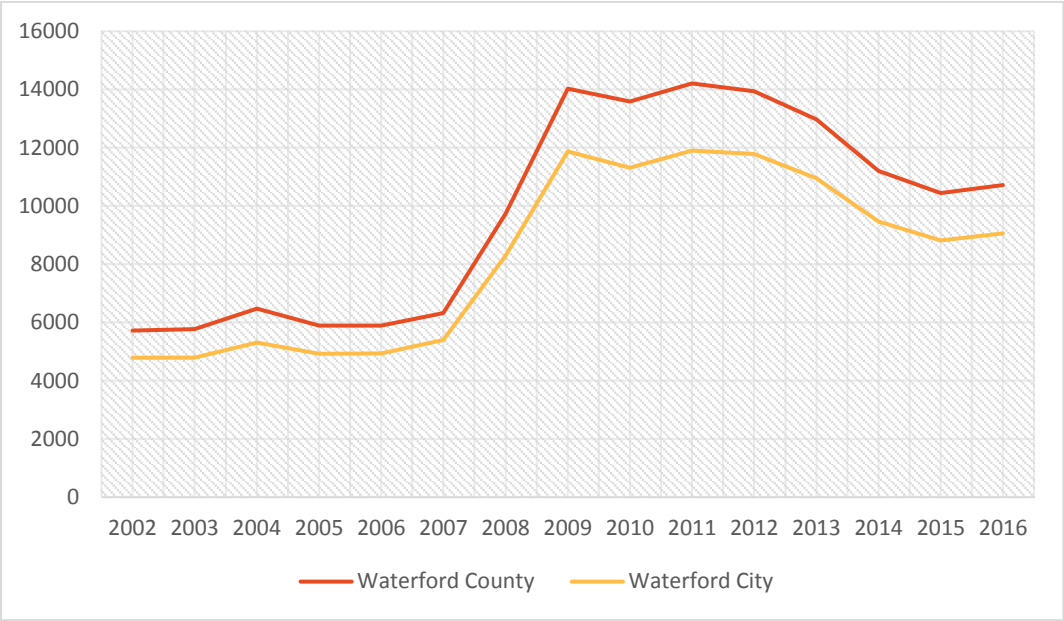
In the early 2000s, while demand for crystal had dropped off, Waterford Crystal was still employing 1500 people in the city and county (RTE 2003). The numbers working for the company decreased through redundancies up to January 2009 when it went into receivership, with the loss of over 1,000 jobs that remained at the factory at that time (Kane 2014). The Waterford Crystal visitor centre reopened the following year in the city centre with glass production reduced to 40 employees. With a population of under 47,000, the loss of 1,500 jobs from the closure of a single factory following over fifty years of production had a palpable effect on the city, its morale and its economy. Compounding the impact of the loss of Waterford Crystal manufacturing, was the closure of TalkTalk, a British broadband service provider, that had established in the city with a customer-care call centre in 1998. It had expanded from employing 30 upon opening to 575 people at the time of its closure in September 2011 (RTE 2011). A former employee who was interviewed by *The Irish Times* at that time remarked 'I was in Waterford Crystal as well and a lot of them in Waterford Crystal

are still walking their dogs. The city hasn't recovered yet and we're joining them now' (Kane 2011).

Redundancies on a smaller scale to TalkTalk and Waterford Crystal continued from the early 2000s onwards. The French pharmaceutical company Sanofi Aventis closed in 2007 with the loss of 200 jobs (Kane 2014), though it has more recently reinvested in the city through its company Genzyme, which established in the city in 2001, and at the end of 2015 employed 550 people (www.genzyme.ie). ABB transformers closed its plant in 2010 with the loss of 178 jobs, and the closure of retail and services industries that supported the city's working population resulted in increasing numbers on the live register. According to census figures for 2011, unemployment in Ireland was at 19% and was highest in the South-East region at 19% for women and 22.6% for men, and higher again in Waterford city and suburbs (24.6% overall) (CSO 2012a).

Unemployment rates have fallen since that time. In the 2014 *Regional Labour Markets Bulletin* it was noted that 'the South-East region appears to have performed rather well on the main labour market indicators' with the number of people in employment steadily increasing (SLMRU 2014, p.8). However, the South-East region continued in 2014 to have the highest rate of unemployment in the country at 15.5%, compared to the national average of 11.7% (Ibid). In quarter four of 2014, the unemployment rate in the South-East remained comparatively high nationally at 12%, behind the Midlands (at 13%) with the highest unemployment rate in the country (SLMRU 2015, p.3). A look at figures on the live register in Waterford city in November 2002 sees the figure at 4, 789, more than doubling to 11,900 in November 2011. Similarly, those on the live register in the county numbered 5,721 in November 2002, increasing to 14,207 in 2011. In August 2016 those on the live register in Waterford City numbered 9,063 and in the county numbered 10,721, which represents an improvement. The graph (Figure 1) indicates however, that the number of people on the live register continues to be significantly higher in 2016, than it was in 2002. While the numbers on the live register have been decreasing since 2011, the line does not indicate an uninterrupted descent.

Figure 1: Persons on live register (number) in Waterford city and county 2002 - 2016, both sexes, all ages



(CSO 2016)

Both the closures of Waterford Crystal and Talk Talk impacted on the local economy to the extent that Ireland made successful bids for funding from the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF). This fund seeks to 'support workers made redundant as a result of major changes in global trade patterns to assist them back into employment as soon as possible' (Department of Education and Skills 2015) and is only available when over 500 workers are made redundant by a single company in a four month period. The fact that Ireland made applications for EGF funding on the closure of six companies nationally, and that two of these six were in Waterford is noteworthy. The city is a comparatively small urban centre by national standards. The population is significantly smaller than the next largest Irish cities, e.g the population was at 46,732 in the city in 2011, compared to Limerick at 57,106 or Galway at 75,529. The impact on household income and the knock-on for tertiary services in the region following losses on the scale of TalkTalk and Waterford Crystal in a small regional city is significant.

The report produced on the Waterford Crystal EGF programme (Department of Education and Skills 2012) commented on the challenges of supporting workers to find jobs, firstly due to the 'general decline in employment opportunities in Ireland, and the South-East region in particular' (p.7); and, secondly, due to the low educational attainment levels among a significant number of the workers, of the 532 EGF eligible workers, 284 had attained primary education only and 15 had attained third level education standard. According to the 2011

census, the percentage of people with a third level qualification varied greatly by county with the highest by a significant percentage being Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown at 40.1 %. Galway city had the second highest rate overall at 31.3 %, considerably higher than either Cork (22.1%) or Waterford at 19.7% (CSO 2012a, p.11). The educational attainment record has a direct correlation with the likelihood of finding employment, that is, continuing on to further and higher education increases the likelihood of finding employment, or as the CSO phrases it 'Census 2011 data shows that persons who were at work finished their education at a later age than those who were unemployed' (CSO 2012a, p.13).

According to the census 2011 summary report *At Work* (CSO 2012b), the greatest decline in numbers employed between 2006 and 2011 was in the broad industrial sectors generally related to construction and manufacturing (p.8). Employment in building of constructions and civil engineering fell by 62.9%. Examples of decline in employment in manufacturing include a fall of 47% in the manufacture of fabricated metal products, a fall of 38% in the manufacture of office machinery and computers, and a fall of 27% in the manufacture of food products (CSO 2012b, p.8). Still in 2011 16% of Waterford city's working population were employed in manufacturing, while manufacturing industry employed 10% nationally and just 5% in Dublin city (CSO 2012b, p.10). In 2011 then, Waterford had a reliance on manufacturing industry above the national norm, and a population educated below the national norm. Taking the South-East region as a whole, which includes Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford, 'over the period 2008 – 2012, the number of industrial units fell by about a quarter' and the number of people employed in industry in the region fell by 15.8% (EGFSN 2015, p.72).

2.3 Government Initiatives

The current *National Skills Strategy* (Department of Education and Skills 2016) opens with a quote from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Secretary-General Angel Gurría:

> Skills have become the global currency of the 21st century. Without proper investment in skills, people languish on the margins of society, technological progress does not translate into economic growth, and countries can no longer compete in an increasingly knowledge-based global society.
>
> (Department of Education and Skills 2016, p.6)

This emphasis on skills recognises the changing nature of the types of job roles becoming available in Ireland. Contraction in the construction, manufacturing and retailing sectors accounted for 260,000 of the 330,000 jobs lost nationally between 2008 and 2012 (Department of Social Protection 2016). It was at this same time that technology companies were unable to fill positions from the national work force and were looking to inward migration to fill 'approximately 55% of their high-level ICT skills supply needs' (EGFSN 2012, p.3). The challenge then is to provide a workforce that is qualified to take on available job roles. This was never as critical as in the aftermath of the economic crisis in 2008 and during the most challenging time of the recession, when unemployment was still rising for the four years that followed.

In January 2011 the HEA, on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills launched the Springboard initiative by issuing a call for programme proposals from HE providers. The objective of the programme was threefold, as its primary aim it endeavoured 'to help unemployed people to remain as close as possible to the labour market by accessing part-time flexible HE and training opportunities to up-skill or re-skill in areas where sustainable employment opportunities may arise as the economy recovers' (HEA 2012, p.7). Its additional objectives were to improve collaborations between enterprise and HE, and to address the *National Skills Strategy* which had been published in 2007 (Ibid). While the publication of the strategy came ahead of the economic crisis, it noted that in a 'no policy change scenario', in 2020, 'there will be surpluses at lower educational levels, with a large number of low-skilled individuals unemployed or inactive' (EGFSN 2007, p.62). It advocated for a change in policy in order to achieve a target of 48 per cent of the labour force holding a qualification at NFQ Levels 6 – 10 (Ibid).

In February 2011, Ireland underwent a change of government after a general election. Following a commitment made in its *Programme for Government* 'to resource a Jobs Initiative within the first 100 days of the start of the Government's term in office', in May 2011 the Department of Finance published its preliminary jobs initiative document (Department of Finance 2011). It made provision in expenditure for '5,900 places for 3rd Level places/Springboard at level 6 and over of the National Framework of Qualifications' stating that 'It will be targeted at those exiting sectors with structural unemployment' with a view to retraining people in areas with identified employment opportunities (2011, p.21). This was followed by a number of action plans. In 2012 the Department of Jobs, Enterprise

and Innovation published its first *Action Plan for Jobs* which included a commitment to 'ensure that people in the Irish labour market, particularly those that have lost their jobs, have access to a quality further and higher education and training system that is aligned with and responsive to the needs of enterprise' (p.31). Government recognised the need for increased numbers of skilled professionals in the domain of ICT. Action 1.35 in the government plan focused on providing education places 'to respond to immediate shortages in the ICT sector' (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation 2012, p.31).

The government plan was integrating into its overall response the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) report outlining workforce shortages entitled *Future Requirement for High-level ICT Skills in the ICT Sector* (2008). It noted in 2008 that 'the Irish ICT sector has largely recovered from the global downturn in market demand that started in 2000/01' and that a shift had occurred in demand, from lower skills jobs in electronics hardware, 'towards software, which predominately employs people with high-level ICT skills' (EGFSN 2008, p.7). It outlined that despite job opportunities, Irish graduate numbers in computing and electronic engineering were declining following a peak around 2002 (Ibid). According to the report, ICT companies operating in Ireland were using three sources of ICT skills; domestic supply of graduates, upskilling and inward migration. The report went on to offer a series of recommendations for filling the gap between supply and demand in order to facilitate growth in the sector which included increasing the numbers of graduates in the sector. An alternative noted in the report could be a negative 'loss of competitiveness' scenario, where growth in the sector would fall, and therefore demand for ICT skills would reduce. In January 2012 the EGFSN published further research findings entitled *Addressing High-Level ICT Skills Recruitment Needs* and there it was noted that 'the primary way of increasing the domestic supply of high-level ICT skills in the short-term is through targeted reskilling and skills conversion programmes for job-seekers' (p.2).

In the same year, 2012, in addition to the government's Action Plan for Jobs, the Department of Education and Skills published an ICT Action Plan in which it outlined the 'target of doubling the annual output from honours degree ICT Undergraduate programmes to 2000 graduates by 2018' (Department of Education and Skills 2012, p.8). Outlining the intake of ICT degree programmes at that time, from the cohorts of students who were already progressing through their computer degrees, and taking into account the projected retention and graduate figures, there was to be a significant graduate gap, e.g., in 2014 the estimated

graduate outflow was 1239, with a shortfall of 797 from desired numbers (Ibid). In order to bridge the gap in the short term, the 2012 ICT Action Plan proposed to increase the graduate supply through Springboard ICT programmes and graduate level conversion programmes.

In 2014, the Department of Education and Skills together with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation published a second ICT plan which reported that significant progress had been made. It outlined that the doubling of ICT graduates at level 8 would be met by 2015 rather than 2018, and the target of 2,000 graduates on ICT reskilling / conversion courses at NFQ level 8/9 had been achieved (Department of Education and Skills and Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation 2014, p.5). Meeting these targets has been largely down to the success of ICT conversion programmes under the Springboard initiative. Conversion programmes allow candidates with qualifications in related disciplines, e.g. engineering, to take intensive, one year or eighteen-month reskilling programmes, and achieve a qualification in ICT. This has facilitated an increase in ICT graduates in less than half the time-frame than a traditional undergraduate degree would allow.

2.4 The Springboard Initiative

Returning to 2011, Springboard was devised as a joint incentive managed by the HEA on behalf of The Department of Education and Skills and co-funded by the Irish government and the European Union. HE providers have submitted proposals annually since 2011 in response to formal calls from the HEA. WIT has had varying levels of success in securing Springboard funding for programmes, and has run a level 8 ICT Skills Conversion programme, a level 8 Higher Diploma in Business Systems Analysis, and a level 6 certificate and level 7 diploma in Computing in Security and Forensics. In student figures, participants availing of Springboard funded places at WIT have varied over the past six years from 48 to 218 (Table 1).

Table 1: Numbers of students availing of Springboard college places at WIT, all disciplines

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
49	218	204	48	162	84

(HEA 2016)

Programmes successful in securing funding have been those that address a demonstrated skills-need. The need, or gaps in the skills of Ireland's workforce, are identified by research undertaken by the EGFSN and are not confined to ICT skills. Year on year, WIT has submitted funding applications that meet the published criteria, which are updated annually. Funding is awarded among Higher Education providers on a competitive basis, so that fulfilling the

published criteria does not guarantee success. The programmes that are most successful in securing repeated funding are those that report successful employment outcomes. While WIT has submitted a consistent portfolio of programmes for funding in successive years, the number of funded places that have been awarded to WIT has varied due to the competitive nature of the initiative, in that programmes seeking funding nationally outnumbers the amount of funding available.

The EGFSN was established in 1997 and its role is to advise government on where potential growth in employment demand is likely to emerge, what skills the working population will need to order to meet the demand, and to feed that information to education and training providers so that appropriate programmes of study and training are put in place. So, for example, as outlined above, it was identified in the EGFSN report in 2012 that companies were 'sourcing approximately 55% of their high-level ICT skills supply needs (for expansion and replacement needs) through inward migration' (p.3). This presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the Irish labour market, to provide people with sufficiently high-level ICT skills in order to take on roles and to mitigate the need for inward migration. The EGFSN shares its labour market research and publishes multiple reports to inform the further and HE sector, including an annual regional labour market bulletin and, specific to the provision of education programmes under Springboard in recent years - guidance for HE providers on current and future skills needs of enterprise.

The HEA published evaluation reports of the Springboard initiative in 2012, 2013 and 2014, and more recently has published three Springboard trend analysis reports, in June 2014, in December 2014 and June 2015 providing analysis of participant and programme profiles, as well as employment outcomes. The programmes offered under Springboard have varied in disciplines from the sciences - biochem and pharmachem - to hospitality i.e. food and beverage skills. The highest percentage of approved programmes in the first three years of the initiative were in the ICT sector representing 38% to 35% of all programmes (see Table 2 below). The allocation of funding allocated to ICT fell to 26% in 2015. Rather than representing a drop in the number of places allocated to ICT, which remains reasonably consistent over the five-year period, the initiative has increased its funding in other discipline areas including biopharmachem, manufacturing and business. An increased allocation of funding has enabled a widening of objectives for the initiative.

Table 2: Springboard participant numbers by skills area

Skills Area	Springboard 2011	Springboard 2012	Springboard 2013	Springboard 2014	Springboard 2015
Manufacturing/ Biopharmachem	839	1,148	1,135	1,351	2,284
Management/Business/ Entrepreneurship	1,339	1,177	1,898	1,084	2,118
ICT (part-time)	1,892	2,064	1,938	1,407	1,809
Financial Services	349	447	291	333	353
Construction/Green Economy	535	468	0	82	348
Other Skills Areas	25	260	246	65	0
Total Participants	**4,979**	**5,564**	**5,508**	**4,322**	**6,912**

(HEA 2016)

Participants on Springboard programmes are not required to pay fees, and if in receipt of social welfare payment, are entitled to remain on the payment while they undertake the programme. In its first year over 85% of participants were either on Jobseekers Allowance (52.9%) or Jobseekers Benefit (33%) (HEA 2012, p.16). The Department of Education established the eligibility criteria for Springboard following consultation with the Department of Social Protection. The group targeted by the initiative has consistently been those who are out of work, but who have a previous history of employment. Over half of Springboard participants each year have been those who are considered long term unemployed, that is over one year out of work, this has varied from 54% to 61% nationally and slightly higher at 56% to 62% in Waterford (see Table 3 below).

Table 3: Springboard participants, Waterford, Length of time seeking employment

Duration of Unemployment at Time of Application	Springboard 2011	Springboard 2012	Springboard 2013	Springboard 2014	Springboard 2015
Redundancy Expected	0% (0)	0% (1)	0% (0)	8% (4)	9% (14)
0-6 months	14% (7)	27% (58)	22% (45)	25% (12)	31% (49)
6-12 months	24% (12)	17% (37)	17% (34)	10% (5)	4% (6)
>12 months	62% (30)	57% (122)	61% (125)	56% (27)	56% (89)
Total	**49**	**218**	**204**	**48**	**158**

(HEA 2016)

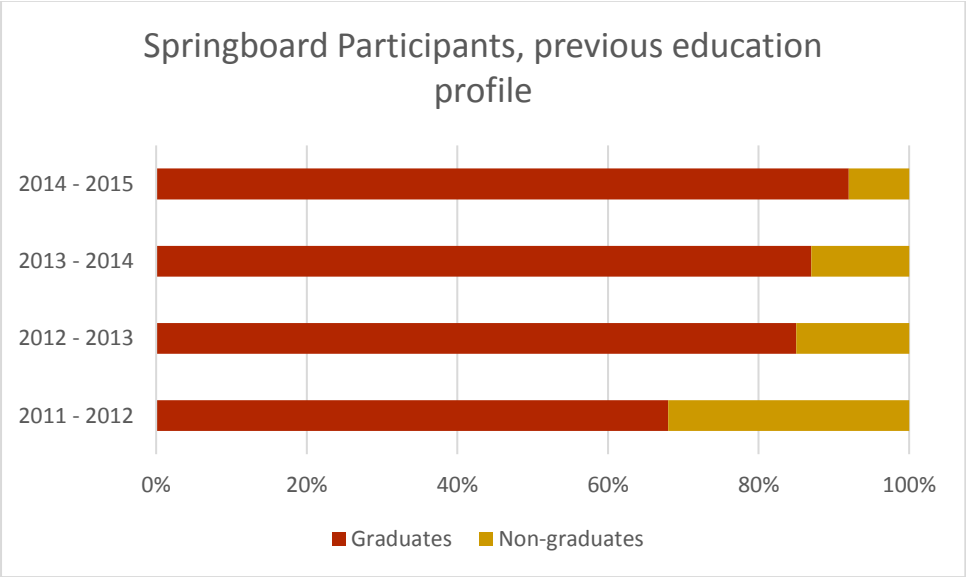
In 2014 – 2015 and most recently 2015 – 2016, a percentage of participants were not on the live register. The figures are not yet available for the most recent cohort, but in 2014 – 2015, 462, or 11.14% of the 4147 participants were not on the live register. This reflects a change

in policy around Springboard funding and participant eligibility specific to ICT conversion programmes. The Springboard eligibility criteria currently reads (in May 2016) that in order to be eligible to apply for ICT conversion programmes, candidates must be '**suitably qualified** or, in line with the policy for recognition of prior learning (RPL) of the HE provider, someone with sufficient relevant experiential learning is eligible to participate on a full-time Level 8 ICT skills conversion course **regardless of employment status and regardless of whether or not s/he is in receipt of income support'** (www.springboardcourses.ie). This relaxation on the criteria for participant eligibility on ICT conversion programmes is reflective of the continuing government policy to 'achieve a leadership position as a digital 'hot-spot in Europe' (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation 2015, p.19). The statement on eligibility suggests that government is keen to facilitate as many potential participants as possible to avail of ICT conversion programmes, allowing those in employment to avail of free college places in order to upskill and contribute to the ambition of increasing the numbers of high-level ICT graduates.

2.4.1 Springboard Participant Profile

An increasing majority of participants have a previous history of educational attainment. In 2011, over 53% of participants availing of Springboard places nationally already held an ordinary degree (NFQ level 7) or higher and 68% held a level 6 qualification or higher (HEA 2012, p.17). In 2014, the numbers of Springboard participants who already held a HE qualification at level 6 or higher had risen to 92% (HEA 2014a, p.11) see Figure 2.

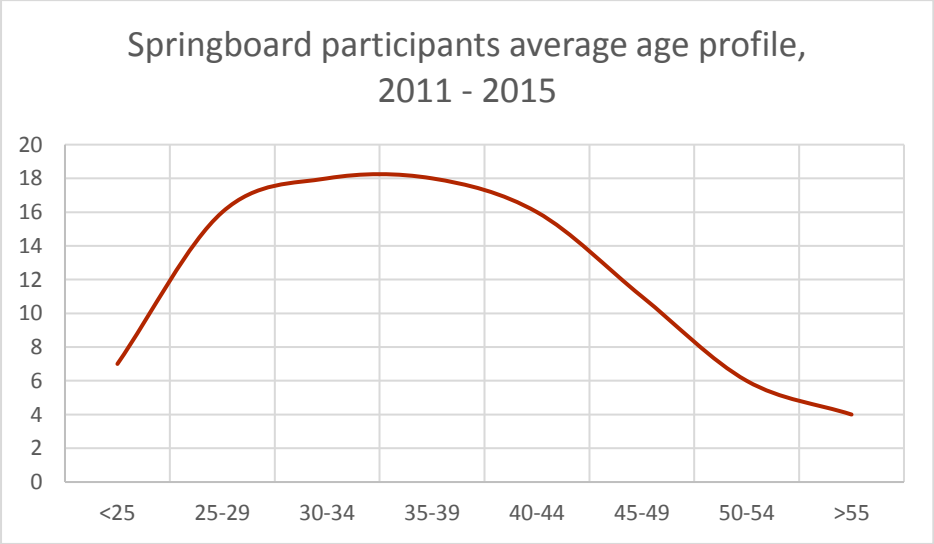
Figure 2: Springboard Participants, Previous Education Profile



(HEA 2014a, p. 11)

In the June 2015 report it was noted that 63% of Springboard participants are aged between 25 and 39 years old (HEA 2015a, p.7). The previous December 2014 report mined into the age profile of participants and identified that 'there is a continuing upward trend towards older age groups availing of Springboard' (HEA 2014a, p.10). Data from the previous four years identified that over half of the participants had been between 30 and 49 years old, see Figure 3 (HEA 2014a, p.10). While men have been in the majority on Springboard programmes, there has been a year-on-year increase in the numbers of women participants – in 2011 26% were women and 74% men, while in 2014 36% were women and 64% were men.

Figure 3: Springboard Participants, Age Profile



(HEA 2014a, p.10)

All participants have a previous history of employment, it is part of the eligibility criteria of the Springboard programme. The types of sectors that participants had previously been working in were outlined in the first-stage evaluation published in 2012. At that time the sectoral spread was wide, with construction representing the highest percentage, at 19.8%, while no one other sector represented more than 8.5% of the participant population. Participants came from 14 different sectors, including industry 7.4%, information and communication (including ICT) 8.5%, and professional, scientific and technical activities 6.0% (HEA 2012, p.16). This indicates that skilled and experienced workers from across a wide spectrum recognise a need, and are willing, to make changes to their profession.

2.4.2 Springboard Programme Outcomes

The programmes on offer have ranged in level from certificate to postgraduate diploma and master's degree (see Table 4 below). The places offered at the different levels have varied from year to year, for example, in 2012, just over 50% of places were at level 8 and 9, with the other half at levels 6 and 7; in 2013 this rose to 58% at level 8 and 9, dropping back again in 2014 to 50% of all places, and in 2015 46% of places were at levels 8 and 9, with the larger percentage of programmes being awarded funding, and places being offered at levels 6 and 7 (see Table 4). There is no limit on the number of Springboard programmes that an individual can undertake, and it is possible to complete a programme at level 6, and progress to another programme at level 7 and so on.

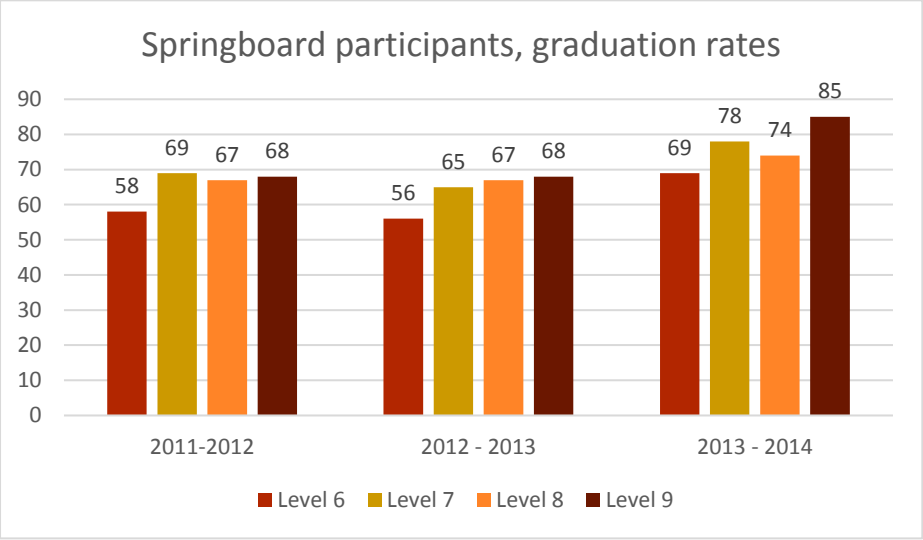
Table 4: Allocation of Places by NFQ Level

NFQ Level	Springboard 2012	Springboard 2013	Springboard 2014	Springboard 2015
Level 6	1,554	1,065	839	1,548
Level 7	1,451	1,463	1,334	2,014
Level 8	2,268	2,225	1,869	2,411
Level 9	801	1,308	1,194	1,778
Total	**6,074**	**6,061**	**6,104**	**7,751**

(HEA 2016)

National programme completion rates for Springboard students was at 65% for the 2012 – 2013 intake, 64% for the 2013 – 2014 intake, and at the time of publication of the HEA's report, a graduate rate of 76% was anticipated of the 2014 - 2015 cohort (HEA 2015a, p.13). The rate of completion differs across disciplines and NFQ levels, with higher completion and graduation figures for those undertaking programmes at the higher levels (see Figure 4). In 2014, the graduation outcome was at 69% at level 6, or certificate level, increasing to 85% at level 9.

Figure 4: Springboard Participants, Graduation Rates



(HEA 2015a, p. 13)

In the Waterford context, overall graduation levels in 2011 were well below the national average at 45%, though the graduation rates have steadily grown since that time reaching 75% in for the 2014 – 2015 cohort (see Table 5).

Table 5: WIT: Springboard Participants, Graduation Rates

Academic Outcome	Springboard 2011	Springboard 2012	Springboard 2013	Springboard 2014
Complete Successful	22 (45%)	146 (67%)	116 (57%)	36 (75%)
Complete Unsuccessful	25 (51%)	72 (33%)	80 (39%)	4 (8%)
Outcome Pending	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	8 (4%)	7 (15%)
Enrolled	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
Total	**49**	**218**	**204**	**48**

(HEA 2016)

The HEA's publication of June 2015 *Where is Springboard Taking Jobseekers?* reported that 'a scan by the Department of Social Protection indicates that 74% of all Springboard participants 2011 – 2014 are no longer on the live register' (p.2). The overall feedback outlined in terms of re-employment outcomes and Springboard graduate feedback is very positive. In particular, the experience of those who have completed ICT Skills conversion programmes, which were offered at level 8, is reported as being unanimously positive in terms of employment outcomes (HEA 2015a, p.12). Of the 347 participants in phase one (2011 – 2013), and the 155 participants in phase two (2012 – 2014), it is reported that 100% of graduates gained employment within 6 months. This compares with a 49% success rate at finding employment within six months among graduates of all other Springboard level 8 programmes (Ibid).

While the response rate is low from participants who completed Springboard programmes at WIT, the results garnered suggest that graduates have a variety of status; in employment, self-employment, further study or seeking work. From the responses received by the HEA, the percentage still seeking work three-to-six months following completion of their programme is dropping (see Table 6). Of the small cohort of 22 who completed their programme in 2011 – 2012, all but one continued on to further study at that time.

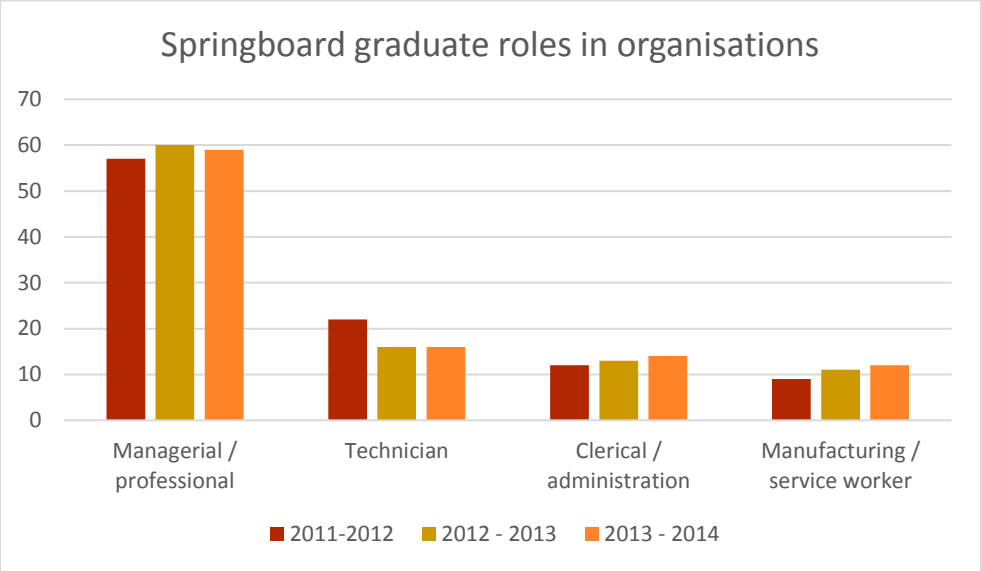
Table 6: 3- 6 month employment outcome for those who completed Springboard in Waterford

3 - 6 Month Employment Outcome	Springboard 2011	Springboard 2012	Springboard 2013	Springboard 2014
In employment	0 (0%)	19 (20%)	36 (35%)	25 (69%)
In self-employment	0 (0%)	12 (13%)	25 (25%)	0 (0%)
Further Study	21 (95%)	26 (28%)	18 (18%)	4 (11%)
Looking for Work	1 (5%)	37 (39%)	23 (23%)	7 (19%)
Reported Outcomes	**22**	**94**	**102**	**36**
(Complete Successful)	(22)	(146)	(116)	(36)

(HEA 2016)

Detail on 'quality of employment' is offered in *Where is Springboard taking Jobseekers?* (HEA 2015, p.13). This includes figures on the full and part-time nature of employment, salary scales, roles in organisations and geographical location. So, for example, it is outlined that nationally, of the 56% of the first Springboard group who gained employment, 85% of those, gained full time employment and it is noted that 'there is an upward trend in the permanency of jobs' (Ibid). Of those in full-time employment, 59% were reported as earning over €25,000 per annum while 24% were reported as earning over €37,200 (HEA 2015, p.14). The majority of participants were reported as being in 'managerial, professional or technical positions' (Ibid).

Figure 5: Role in organization – all graduates and all those with outcome pending



(HEA 2015a, p. 15)

2.4.3 Springboard Participant Feedback

Springboard participants have been surveyed on their experience each year (HEA 2014b, p.21) and reports assert that the feedback has been largely positive 'with a trend upwards across a range of indicators including participants' expectations of Springboard, their positive experience of support and the impact that Springboard has on their lives' (Ibid). The responses for 'Springboard measures up well to my expectations' (Table 7) and 'the prospect of getting a good job after the course was a strong reason for applying' (see Table 8) show an improvement in the positive nature of the feedback.

Table 7: 'Springboard measures up well to my expectations'

2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
82%	90%	92%	94%

(HEA 2014b, p.21)

Table 8: 'Confidence that Springboard will lead to a job'

2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
68%	87%	74%	82%

(HEA 2014b, p.21)

The latter indicator suggests that participants are taking into account the wider economic context in terms of recovery, as well as their own enhanced employability. Of the 2011 –

2012 cohort from WIT, 95% continued on to further study. Confidence in finding work remained low at that time. As the economy recovered, so did confidence in securing a job.

Table 9: % of Participants reporting that Springboard is having a positive impact on their lives

2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
78%	91%	92%	93%

(HEA 2014b, p.21)

The 2011 - 2012 WIT Springboard graduates were asked 'Thinking back to before your course, and since finishing your course, would you say that your overall outlook and optimism about your career prospects are?' 35% responded that their career prospects were 'far better'. For the 2014 – 2015 group, this had increased to 61% (see Table 10).

Table 10: Thinking back to before your course, and since finishing your course, would you say that your overall outlook and optimism about your career prospects are -

Response	Springboard 2011	Springboard 2012	Springboard 2013	Springboard 2014
Far better	8 (35%)	29 (38%)	33 (40%)	11 (61%)
Quite a bit better	12 (52%)	25 (32%)	31 (37%)	5 (28%)
About the same	2 (9%)	16 (21%)	13 (16%)	2 (11%)
I am less optimistic than before	1 (4%)	7 (9%)	6 (7%)	0 (0%)
Total	**23**	**77**	**83**	**18**

(HEA 2016)

The data in this section indicates that the Springboard programme has enjoyed success in terms of graduate outcomes. This study aims to add to the available data by providing a qualitative perspective on the experience.

2.5 Employability Agenda

The purpose of Springboard in reskilling people into areas where job market demand exists is clear; the current guidelines for HE providers outlines its objectives as; firstly, to get unemployed people back into sustainable employment; secondly, 'to enhance greater collaboration between enterprise and higher education'; and thirdly, 'to enhance the skills profile of the labour force' (EGFSN 2016, p.1). The role of HE in preparing graduates for the workplace and answering an 'employability agenda' can be problematic for the HE sector. There is little doubt in the policy writing of the HEA of recent times that a key function of third level institutions is to contribute to the economy as HE providers 'are increasingly relied upon as the powerhouses of the global economy, on which our economic competitiveness and prosperity ultimately depend' (2013a, p.4). This is reiterated as a function of

technological universities, with an emphasis placed on education for the jobs marketplace. Upon publication of the *General Scheme of Technological Universities Bill* in January 2014, the Minister for Education emphasised that the new institutions would be 'fundamentally different from the academic universities, their distinct mission would be to provide high quality enterprise focused education and research' (Ahlstrom 2014).

There is an increased onus then on HE institutions to meet the demands of employers (Boden and Nedeva 2010, Tomlinson 2012) and enable students to improve their generic skills, as well as their technical and academic ability, in order to come to the market place 'job-ready' (e.g. Moreau and Leathwood 2006; Andrews and Higson 2008; Hall, Higson and Bullivant 2009*).* This applies across the sector, but is particularly pertinent for Springboard funded programmes. Boden and Nedeva (2010) argue while it was once the case that graduates brought their higher education to the labour market and found positions for which their employers would train them, now it is the HEI which must prepare students for specific jobs, rather than for employment in a more general sense (Boden, Nedeva 2010). Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) noted in their study of the perceptions of graduate employability amongst over 100 employers that 'the majority of employers require graduates to perform to expectation by the end of the first year, with many attributes required on appointment' (p.570).

From the perspective of the HE sector, *The National Strategy for Higher Education* (Department of Education and Skills 2011) outlines engagement with industry as one of its core missions and Section 6 of the report deals with teaching and learning strategies and specifically states that 'undergraduate and postgraduate education should explicitly address the generic skills required for effective engagement in society and in the workplace' (2011, p.18). Frameworks for generic skills in education, reflecting the National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ 2013) rely on identifying and measuring know-how and skills, often referred to as competences. The generic skills referred to in government agency policy documentation are likewise not defined and along with the concept of employability are subject of much discussion and study (e.g. Lowden et al. 2011, Hinchliffe and Jolly 2011). Generic employability competences identified in the MISLEM project (Andrews and Higson 2008) were determined following 50 semi-structured interviews with employers and graduates (in the business sector) in four European countries. They include communication skills, team-working, strategic and critical thinking. Yorke (2004) suggests that employability is 'a set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupation'

(cited in Moreau and Leathwood 2007, p.308). The concept of employability remains as a variously defined set of skills and attributes and so-called 'generic skills' present a challenge to measurement. At a work placement conference in 2013, the chair of EGFSN Una Halligan noted the 'rise in the importance of generic skills' (Halligan 2013) and she pointed to skills demands that had been identified in EGFSN reports including project management, business acumen, applying theory in practice, communication skills and team working.

2.6 Work Placement

While candidates on Springboard programmes all have a previous history of employment, and so have had some opportunity to develop their generic skills, the domain of work experience that candidates have varies (HEA 2012, p.14). In 2011 8.5% of Springboard participants across all programmes had experience of working in ICT, while 37% were undertaking ICT programmes (Ibid). In order to help students become industry ready, the presence of a work placement on Springboard programmes has been encouraged. The current guidance document for HE providers applying for Springboard funding states that 'programmes should ideally offer a structured work placement focussed on enhancing the employability of the graduate, particularly with regards to enterprise/generic skills.' (EGFSN 2016, p.3).

In her work placement conference presentation Halligan (2013) summarises the findings relevant to internships and work placements in the EGFSN Report on High-Level ICT Skills Recruitment Needs. The feedback for internships from an employers' perspective was positive – it was felt that internships 'are invaluable in preparing students for work' and recommended that they should become 'an integral part of both undergraduate and postgraduate courses' (Halligan 2013). This mirrors the objectives of the *National Skills Strategy 2025* which aims that all full-time students on HE programmes from level 6 – level 8 should have a work placement element as part of their programme of study (2016, p.117). This measure is given both as a 2025 indicator, and a mid-term indicator. The strategy notes that according to the *National Student Survey 2015*, currently 63.2% of students surveyed had done, or were going to do 'work experience or an industry placement over the course of their studies' (cited in National Skills Strategy 2016, p.117).

The research points predominantly to the benefits of a work placement within HE, in order to improve graduate employability or 'job-readiness'. The University of Glasgow, in research

commissioned by the Edge Foundation (who promote 'learning by doing'), conducted research including nine employer case studies and 14 HEIs and argue that:

> the literature and our own findings have overwhelmingly highlighted that employers, students, graduates and HEI representatives value work-based learning (such as placements and internships) as particularly effective approaches to promote the employability of graduates.
>
> (Lowden et al. 2011, p. vi)

In addition to work placement, structured career guidance on Springboard programmes is considered 'paramount' (EGFSN 2016, p.3). This differs across programmes nationally and within HE providers, for example, in WIT this varies from accredited modules in career development, to non-accredited support lectures and workshops in CV preparation and interview skills, etc.

There is no doubt that HE contributes to a graduate's individual skills, understandings and personal attributes, which Yorke (2004 cited in Moreau and Leathwood 2007, p.308) suggests make up their employability. The work placement contributes to this. Elsewhere, however, it is argued that a degree programme, with or without a work placement programme, does not hold the same value for all graduates. It is necessary to take into account the multiplicity of factors that create the graduate profile (Bowman et al. 2005, Tomlinson 2012). Moreau and Leathwood (2006) warn against the employability discourse in which 'being a skilled individual equals being empowered' (p.310) and that 'failure in this context thereby becomes personal failure, something that is reinforced with the emphasis on personal skills' (p.311*).*

2.7 Research Participant Overview

The shared participant experience - returning to college as an experienced member of the workforce, in order to reskill for employment - is embedded in Waterford and the South-East. The experience of these participants reflects some of the challenges facing the region more broadly. Participants have either lost work through redundancy, or are attempting to return to the workplace and have been unable to secure jobs. By way of introduction to the research participants a few lines on each interviewee is offered here. This includes the participants' gender, age, discipline and work background.

Kate is 48 and a trained nurse. She worked in intensive care units in Ireland and abroad, before starting a family. She then worked in the home and remained out of paid

employment while raising her children. Prior to coming on the Springboard programme she completed a Government funded level 6 qualification in computer programming. She is keen to pursue a career that incorporates computing and digital skills.
Marianne is 36 and comes from a business administration background. She worked in a solicitor's office in Dublin for a time, prior to moving home to the South-East region. Health issues currently prevent her from pursuing full time employment though she continues to develop new interests and skills.
Elinor is 42 and worked in a financial software environment in London, before returning to Waterford and starting a family. She remained at home with her children for a number of years prior to undertaking the Springboard programme as a way back into the paid workforce.
Like Elinor, **Claire** is 42 and worked in the financial sector in London before returning home to Waterford. She began a family and has children of primary school-going age. She is keen to return to full time paid employment after a period of working in the home.
Eithne is 35, graduated with a business degree, and worked in Irish banking prior to 2008. When she was made redundant she worked for a family business and was looking for an opportunity for change when the Springboard programmes became available.
Anna is 35. She graduated with a degree in business and worked for financial companies in Ireland including an investment firm and an international banking and financial services company. She was unhappy in her work and took redundancy which provided her with the means to finance a return to college.
Beth gained a business degree and as a young graduate worked in project management in the United States. After the birth of her first child, she and her husband returned to Ireland and she worked in the home while her children were young. In her early forties she took part-time work, and now at 48 is keen to return to full-time employment.
Tom is 49 and has engineering training and experience. He worked in the UK and Norway prior to marrying and settling in the South-East in 2000. He found it challenging to secure well paid engineering roles in the region, and following 2008 he spent a number of years in unemployment.
Fred is 30 and one of two participants who are under the age of 35. In addition, he is the only non-level 8 graduate among the interviewees. He completed a diploma when he left school and worked with a family-owned steel fabrication company throughout the years of the recession. As the economy recovers he is keen to seek new opportunities.

David is 28 and a graduate of engineering. On leaving college he travelled to find work in Canada and when unsuccessful he returned to Ireland and worked on the family farm. He secured some short-term work with a manufacturing firm.
Amos is the only non-Irish born participant in this study. He is 43, Nigerian and graduated in Lagos with a BA in Agricultural Economics. Having worked in various business management roles, he immigrated to Ireland in his mid-thirties to join his wife and children who had moved here. He worked in the home with his children while his wife pursued her studies. Immediately prior to coming on the Springboard programme he completed a Higher Certificate in Business Studies in Ireland.
Joe completed an arts degree in psychology and continued his studies with a post-graduate qualification in environmental management. He went on to work for software logistics companies and completed a IT qualification. He moved home to Waterford in his mid-thirties, is now 42 and married with young children. He left salaried employment to set up as a training consultant in 2007, but this proved unsustainable through the recession.
Brian is 43, with a degree in business and experience in business management. Like Anna, he used an offer of redundancy to leave his current role where he was unhappy, to finance a return to college. He is married with young children.
Seán is now 35. On leaving school he took on roles in hospitality and construction. Following 2007, this work was no longer available. Seán was then in his late twenties and went to college and completed a Bachelor of Business Studies degree.

2.8 Conclusion

As opportunities in traditional modes of employment narrow, government has identified the potential employment growth area of ICT. It is recognised in the region that there is a need to rethink the employment profile, to rely less for example on manufacturing industry, and harness potential growth in emerging industries. Like each of the participants, the South-East region is attempting to redefine itself and its identity.

The recognised need for IT graduates and the provision of free places on IT programmes has opened a door for these participants. In telling their career stories, they express that they always had an interest in IT and a sense of self-efficacy. They anticipate engaging successfully with the programme of study. These are the Higher Diploma in Business Systems Analysis, and the Diploma in Computing and Forensics. Participant experience of re-entering the work

place while on placement on these programmes provides us with a window to their experience of reskilling and reimagining who they are in a work context.

Government initiatives repeatedly state the ambition 'to support development of a well-educated, well-skilled and adaptable labour force' (Department of Education and Skills Jan 2016 p.14). Enterprise 2025 emphasises the need for 'higher order skills' (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation 2015, p.22) and while the objective of doubling ICT graduates has been reached ahead of target, the strategy restates the ambition to 'meet three quarters of demand for high level ICT skills through domestic supply of graduates by 2018' (p.19). Savickas et al. (2009) maintain that 'insecure workers in the information age must become life-long learners who can use sophisticated technologies, embrace flexibility rather than stability, maintain employability, and create their own opportunities' (p.240). The experience of this cohort offers some insight into what that experience is like at a personal level.

Chapter 3 - Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

The study looks at the experience of mature interns retraining for a change of career direction. In order to make sense of this, the literature search began by looking at concepts of identity within the context of career. It was anticipated that the challenge of changing identity would be central to the experience under study. Van Manen describes the role of literature as 'insight cultivators' (2014, p.324). While it is important to read widely and in depth around the experience under study, it is equally important to adopt the 'époché' when analysing participant stories. This is the process of setting aside personal values and knowledge in order to look at the experiental accounts as they are presented, to remain as close to the participant experience as possible. Moran (2002) describes Husserl's suspension of the natural attitude thus: 'we should attend only to the phenomena in the manner of their being given to us, in their *modes of givenness'* (p.11). This is best achieved when our assumptions about the world are put to one side.

While the research outcome is presented here in linear form, the research process was cyclical. The literature was originally visited and the review written, considering the idea of economic and cultural contexts, and the ability of individuals to shape their own career identities within that context. The literature was then set aside in the analysis phase of the research as part of the 'bracketing' process and the experience was looked at in how it was given. Rather than a central theme of identity then, it emerged that meaning-making is what is central to the experience of being a mature intern. Ideas of identity and self are contained within the process of looking for purpose and meaning from work. It became apparent that it is through relationships that meaning is given to experience and to the telling of experience. In order to capture and represent this, the literature was revisited and this chapter rewritten.

The chapter then is structured looking at the aspects of career literature that emerged as themes in the data. A key theme remains our economic and cultural contexts and our place within those contexts. Heidegger terms existence as 'Dasein', which incorporates not just the self, but also how Dasein is 'in the world' - always engaging with other entities and the environment (Inwood 1997, p.22). The concept of Dasein allows possibilities of being, or for the potential autonomy of a human being within the world. In his work *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues:

> Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence, in terms of its possibility to be itself or not to be itself. Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, stumbled upon them, or already grown up in them.
>
> (1927, p.16)

This concept is often referred to in the literature as the interplay between structure and agency, or the potential for the autonomy of the self within cultural, political and social contexts. This will be outlined below, with the study drawing on Foucauldian and constructionist thought. The three key overlapping elements of the experience which emerge are adaptable activity, relationality, and narratability, with meaning-making at the core of work activity. Each of these elements are examined here. At the end of this chapter, a theoretical model is offered, drawing on the elements of the existing career literature that resonates with the experience under study.

3.2 The Idea of Self

Career literature is permeated with ideas of the potential for individual agency within the structure of our social, economic, political and personal lives. The Foucauldian world view presents a self that exists only within the context of our engagement with the world (Hall 1996). A self exists that is constantly interacting and changing, being influenced by and influencing, being formed and reformed by our engagement in the world, or as Foucault terms by 'discursive practice' (Foucault 1970, xiv cited in Hall 2000, p.16). Identity is not 'that stable core of the self' (Hall 2000, p.17) nor a true, unwavering self that is hiding beneath more superficial manifestations of the self. Hall points out that the notion of a subjective essentialist identity that remains integral to the self through life is no longer accepted in postmodern thinking (2000, p.15). As in post-structuralist thought, 'identity is always – indeed is only – process' (McKinlay 2010, p.234). Consistent with social constructionism, Hall argues that identity in its conception is fragmented and constantly changing, and constructed within and through, rather than outside, personal and social realities. 'Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us' (Hall 2000, p.19). The 'discursive practices' that Hall refers to are the patterns of everyday life, the ordinary and mundane manifestations of our cultural practice, our habits and customs of eating, dressing, working, engaging with family, interacting with work colleagues, our modes of relaxation.

While these ideas are consistent with Heidegger's concept of 'Dasein', the focus of Foucault's work is in the dynamic of power/knowledge within the Discourse. In Foucauldian thought,

Discourse represents all interactions and domains of life. Foucault argues that these are systemised practices, both influencing and being influenced by power/knowledge. So, for example, the separation of work into paid employment and unpaid housework and childcare, the notion of work versus leisure time etc. are cultural and political constructs within our lives. In each of these we both exercise power and/or feel, whether overtly or not, the exertion of power over us. Gender, age, economics, education and skills are all sites of 'a dialectic of freedom and constraint' (McKinlay 2010, p.234). Hegemony, that is the dominance of one group over another, is always fragile however and therein lies the potential for change and resistance. When it comes to the place of the individual self within the Discourse, Foucault does not use the term identity, but instead writes about the related notion of subjectivity, and consistently argues for its reliance on the historical and social worlds, and always in the context of power/knowledge (Collinson 2003). Judith Butler outlines and applies Foucauldian thoughts on self and subjectivity in the context of gender, arguing that there is 'no 'I' that stands *behind* discourse and executes its volition or will *through* discourse' (Butler 1993, p.109). For example, a girl does not come into the world as a gendered being first, and then gravitate towards particular ways of dressing, playing and being, rather as Butler says 'the discursive condition of social recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms that subject' (Ibid), so a child becomes, through social practices, a gendered child. In the context of the current study for example, where the IT domain is male dominated, why do women self-select out of careers in IT? In earlier choices why do girls choose not to take on maths at higher level in secondary school? It is not possible to consider a self that stands outside the context of a given culture.

Butler gives us the notion of performativity 'as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains' (Butler 1993, p.2 cited in Hodgson 2005, p.55). It is in repeating behaviours, phrases, interactions that performativity lies. Performativity is both how we manifest ourselves and our identity, and become and 'are' ourselves. McKinlay notes that 'for Butler, identity is enacted through the 'forced reiteration of norms' (2010, p.235). An illustration of this is in a story covered widely in the press recently about a female temporary agency employee who was sent home from work on her first day with a corporate finance company for refusing to wear between two and four inch heels (Khomani 2016). The wearing of heels is a process of performativity, a professional female wears heels, so then by putting on heels she is asserting her identity as a professional female, then in order to identify as a professional female she must wear heels and the employment agency embed this in their 'personal appearance guidelines' (Ibid) eliminating

the power of choice. Hodgson argues that 'hence, the repetition of identifiable performances enacts the 'professional' into being and simultaneously constrains the 'professional's' conduct' (2005, p. 56).

Foucault maintains that hegemony is fragile and similiarly, Butler argues that performativity is a process that is 'inherently unstable, latent with the possibility of resistance' (McKinlay 2010, p. 235). There is opportunity then for subversion within discursive practices. So, for example, shoes can become a focus of protest and resistance, and generate wide debate and interest online and in traditional media, leading to demands for company protocols to change. When we conceptualise 'an engineer', the professional we imagine is likely to be male, but this can change – we can imagine a female engineer. Hodgson argues that 'this reworking of the structure/agency debate offers a persuasive conception of subjectivity' that is ''always already" compromised by its formation through power' (2005, p. 53). Segal (2008) posits that 'identities, as we have learned to see them today, are best seen as unstable, contingent and always in need of re-affirmation through the performative work we must do to stabilize them as safe and secure marks of our existence' (Segal 2008, p. 385).

Performativity is a process of repetition and Hodgson (2005) notes the importance of the context of the past, present and future to this. This includes the past, our claims about this past and the authenticity of these claims, or their truth value. Collinson (2003) when talking about identity and subjectivity points back to human self-consciousness and reflexivity. Giddens (1991, p 74) observes that the self is a 'reflexive project' and that 'the reflexivity of the self is continuous' (1991, p. 76). He notes that self-identity 'is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography' (1991, p. 53). A first premise then of this study is that individuals have career possibilities, but as Heidegger phrases it, those possibilities may have been chosen, stumbled upon, or we may have been reared in them. A second premise is that our working lives, even when reflexively understood by ourselves, are socially and not individually constructed.

Much of the career literature reflects ideas of subjectivity, and the power of the individual to become, be and describe their working self, within the context of their social and economic worlds. Certainly the ideas of agency – the extent to which people are free to determine their own working lives, and structure – and the enabling or inhibiting factors, whether actual or perceived, of education, economics, geography, gender etc. permeate the literature. They are oftentimes referred to explicitly as agency and structure. Savickas's career construction theory (2013) will be presented, and how this overlaps with other career

theories will be outlined, including Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent, Brown and Hackett 1994; Brown and Lent 1996; Lent, Brown and Hackett 2000; Lent and Brown 2013), Hodkinson et al.'s model of careership (1997, 2005 and 2008) and Blustein et al.'s psychology-of-working perspective (2008, 2011). Some key themes emerge across the career literature though varying frameworks are offered. The first to be addressed is the concept of Context in Section 3.3. Within this, the first sub-theme is a perceived change in the nature of the working world and so the changing nature of our engagement with it in post-modern times, at least in advanced market economies. This is outlined in Section 3.3.1. A second sub-theme is the varying contexts in which the self is formed, and how career literature interrogates this is examined in Section 3.3.2. A third and final sub-theme examines the normative expectations of working lives at various life stages. The framework of the lifespan is examined in Section 3.3.3.

Following on, and within the holding space of context, three further themes are presented as overlapping, with the final element of meaning-making at the centre. The first is adaptability which reappears across career literature and will be examined in Section 3.4. It is agreed that the globalised economy requires people to be prepared to adapt and change with changing workplace demands. A second emergent theme is the relational nature of work. A person's working life cannot be separated from the rest of a person's reality, family, health and the broader social, cultural and economic context all have impact on a person's work life (e.g. Blustein et al. 2004; Schultheiss 2006; Blustein et al. 2008; Amundson et al. 2010; Blustein 2011; Richardson 2012). This may seem obvious, the philosophical frameworks outlined in the following chapter take it to be the case that the self, experience and the world cannot be separated from each other. This theme will be explored under Section 3.5. The final theme presented here is that of a career narrative, presented under Section 3.6. This encompasses the idea that a career identity is framed by stories, or career narratives, that include making sense of the past and present and making plans for the future (Fugate 2004; LaPointe 2010; Meijers and Lengelle 2012). This moves closer to Heidegger who 'advocates the utilization of hermeneutics as a research method founded on the ontological view that lived experience is an interpretive process' (Crotty 1996, p.133). Finally, it is argued that meaning-making lies at the intersection of these three themes. The contribution of this study is to propose a theoretical model that draws on current and emerging career theory, but places meaning-making at the centre of the experience of being a mature intern.

3.3 Context

3.3.1 Economic, Social & Cultural Contexts

Context includes gender, age, socio-demographics, economics, culture. It encompasses our wider cultural and political context and the normative expectations that exist in our family structures, in our social circles, in our working contexts and in our culture. Giddens refers to what 'Berger calls the 'pluralisation of the life-worlds' in that modern social life is more diverse and segmented than in previous eras' (1991, p. 83). In traditional societies he argues, there was little space for choosing how to live. Caste, class, geography and gender largely determined life choices. While he maintains that no culture eliminates choice, 'yet, by definition, tradition or established habit orders life within relatively set channels' (Giddens 1991, p. 80). He argues that 'in the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a reflexively organized endeavour' (1991, p. 5).

This overlaps with the 'telling' of identity, it is in the telling that we summon our identity into being as we attempt to create a coherent self, making sense of ourselves to ourselves as well as to others. Giddens argues that this is a challenge that did not exist in previous eras. A post-feudal world is more diverse and segmented and more choices are presented to people with little guidance on what choices to make. Collinson (2003) applies this idea to the context of 'selves at work' and points to the USA where the idea that you can be whatever it is you want to be is enshrined in the concept of the American dream. He posits that 'while these changes have produced greater 'freedom' and choice for human beings, they have also resulted in increasingly precarious, insecure and uncertain subjectivities' (2003, p. 530). De Botton explores this notion in *Status Anxiety* (2004) where he considers the move to meritocratic societies and the challenges this presents to individuals to establish meaningful identities. Collinson (2003) outlines the change from pre-modern to modern societies, and notes 'a shift in social values from 'ascription' in feudalistic societies to 'achievement' in modern' (p. 530). Collinson argues that 'meritocratic ideologies are typically espoused in societies that are also characterized by deep-seated class and status inequalities' (p. 531). What is emerging here is that the concept that you can be whatever it is you want to be is both untrue and unhelpful.

However, in some career theory, e.g. Briscoe and Hall 2006 and Sullivan and Arthur 2006 the change in the last century to post-industrialisation is seen as an opportunity for the individual to take control of their own working life. Douglas Hall, for example, proposes the idea of the

'protean career' to describe an empowering approach to work and career. It is 'a career orientation in which the person, not the organization, is in charge, where the person's core values are driving career decisions and where the main success criteria are subjective' (Hall 2004, 1). Central to the concept of the protean career are the individual attributes of adaptability and self-awareness.

Other theorists are less convinced about individual empowerment. Richardson (2012), contends that 'the context of market work is not only one of radical change, it is also one of deteriorating conditions, especially in the United States' (p. 193). Collinson, Giddens and De Botton emphasise the insecurity and anxiety this may provoke, Collinson for example asserts that 'material and symbolic insecurities crucially impact on the selves and subjectivities that currently shape modern workplace practices' (2003, p. 532). Savickas (2013) also notes the shift in the contemporary global economy and asserts that workers must be flexible in order to maintain employability. Job security is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain and 'rather than make plans, individuals must prepare themselves for possibilities' (Savickas 2013, p. 149). Hirschi and Dauwalder (2015) note the shift of responsibility for career management from the employer to the employee and they posit that 'these changes have profound effects on how careers develop, resulting in more nonlinear and less predictable patterns' (p. 27). There is agreement amongst all theorists that the world of work has become increasingly uncertain, with ever decreasing levels of job security.

3.3.2 Person Contexts

Career theorists take account of discursive practices, or the context in which the self is formed, using a variety of frameworks and terms. Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994) adapt Bandura's social cognitive theory and propose Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). SCCT differentiates between different types of environmental factors, identifying distal and proximal. Distal influences are described as 'background contextual factors that affect the learning experiences through which career-relevant self-efficacy and outcome expectations develop' (Brown, Lent and Hackett 2000, p. 37). This could include, for example, previous educational experiences, such as attending an all-girls school where Leaving Certificate higher level maths was not offered, due to small numbers taking the subject, and so notions of self-efficacy in maths are affected. Proximal influences are those contextual factors that impact at the time when key career decisions are being made, for example when a person returns to college following redundancy, they will consider, is it a funded programme?, can I ask my partner to support me financially and emotionally through a three year programme, which programme is likely to pay shorter term dividends?

In order to look at long-term career progression over a number of studies since the early 1990s, Hodkinson and his colleagues (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997; Bowman, Hodkinson and Colley 2005; Hodkinson 2008) developed a model of careership. This model draws heavily on the work of Bourdieu, and looks at three inter-related elements: dispositions, interactions in the field, and on-going development or transformation. The underlying understanding is that the nature of career is multidisciplinary; that it is an area of life where the individual makes decisions and exerts influence but within the realm of their reality. Hodkinson et al. refer to this realm as the individual's 'horizon for action' (cited in Bowman et al. 2005, p. 93). The assumption here is that individuals are active agents in determining their future, though not without limitations of structure; e.g. class, education, geography, economics, both local and global etc. Bourdieu's theories prove useful in navigating the multiplicity of experience noted in career studies (e.g. Bowman, Hodkinson et al. 2005).

Bourdieu (in Hodkinson 2008) uses the term 'habitus' to describe the set of dispositions that determine a person's actions. Habitus includes the genetic as well as the social and culturally acquired dispositions. It is not just that the individual operates within the structure of society, those structures or norms are infused in their habitus. So it is that a person's place in the field and their opportunities within it are determined by their dispositions and also by the dynamics of the field. Success or failure in a given field relies on economic, cultural and social capital (Ibid). Individuals operate in multiple fields at any given time, the jobs market is one, but family and community spheres could represent others.

3.3.3 The Context of the Life Span

Sugarman points out that 'we cannot escape the reality that lives are lived and understood in time' (2004, p. 11). We are born, we grow from childhood to adulthood and pass from old age to death. This same course is not followed universally of course, and Sugarman points out that 'a life course perspective acknowledges that the trajectory from birth to death is highly personal and unique to each individual, and yet also contains experiences and events common to most members of a social group' (p. 4). In 1980 Super proposed a life-span, life-space approach to career development, and provided the metaphor of a Life-Career Rainbow to the life stages of growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance and decline. This has been adopted and adapted over time, for example by Lent and Brown (2013) who adapt Super's model to look at adaptive career behaviours over different periods and roles, from growth as a child and student through to disengagement/ reengagement as a retiree.

The life-span perspective that Sugarman (2001) outlines challenges the idea that 'the lifeline must reach a plateau and/or decline during adulthood and old age' (p. 13). Sugarman draws on Levinson (1996) using the life structure that evolves over the course of a life-time 'through a series of alternating structure-changing (or transitional) and structure-building (or consolidating) phases' (2004, p. 8). The use of phases she argues helps to reimagine and normalise change during adulthood. While it may not reflect physical or biological functioning, it gives the potential for continuous growth and development across the life-span. The normative expectations, or traditional career myth of a linear path through the world of work, with deviations from this path considered disruptive are especially unhelpful when they are disproved by experience. Mignot proposes that 'in order to encapsulate the irreducible hermeneutic characteristic of a career, a non-linear form of representation is required' (2004, p. 457).

Savickas (2013) provides a model of career construction across life stages, to explain firstly how people create a self; secondly, how they direct a working life; and then thirdly how they tell that story, both to themselves and to others. In this Savickas proposes a developmental pathway towards and through a working life. He identifies three perspectives; 'self as actor, self as agent, and self as author' (Savickas 2013, p. 147). The theory draws on the epistemology of social constructionism, asserting that 'a self is built from the outside in, not from the inside out' (p. 148). We co-construct a sense of ourselves through our social interactions. The theory begins by looking at the actor stage – beginning in infancy when individuals engage with the social realm and are influenced by family and surroundings to create a sense of self and space. Factors influencing character include gender, class, ethnicity, birth order, etc. All of this will in time contribute to an individual's 'career theme' (p. 151). Those who influence us include guides – family members most potently parents – and role models, those whom we select for ourselves as having something we strive for.

Career construction theory does not integrate trait theory into the actor stage, that is, it does not subscribe to the belief that individuals are born with traits that are independent of reality and would remain consistent across geography and time. Rather it maintains that we rehearse behaviours and habits through play as children, and over time develop skills and aptitudes that become known as our personality or 'reputation' (p. 153). 'As children grow as actors, they develop an internal sense of agency' (p.155). This leads us into the second stage of self-as-agent, when people negotiate the transitions into and out of education and the workplace.

3.4 Adaptable Activity

In Savickas's framework central to the agency phase is the notion of adapting, which Savickas defines as 'bringing inner needs and outer opportunities into harmony' (2013, p. 157). While other definitions of adapting in a career context do not include achieving harmony, as in Savickas' interpretation of the term, the challenge of adapting appears in all of the career literature. Blustein et al. (2004) argue that the notion of adaptability is less helpful than 'the process of reinventing oneself in the work and relationship space' (2004, p. 429). They point to the fact that while adaptability implies independent functioning, reinvention is more socially constructed. Richardson (2012) similarly argues that 'adaptation implies adapting to prevailing conditions' and proposes a more holistic approach to career counselling, helping people shape and develop healthy lives while taking into consideration the work and non-work realms. This research aligns with social constructionism, which acknowledges the usefulness of flexible responses within a career context (e.g. Savickas et al. 2009). The terms adaptability and adaptable activity are used here though not without acknowledging that these terms lie within a broader discourse.

Savickas (2013) notes that people differ in how willing and prepared they are to adapt to change, the resources they have to allow and manage change, the extent to which they do in fact adapt to change, and ultimately how successfully they adapt to life roles over time. Savickas considers adaptability resources and identifies four dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Career construction theory considers career concern to be the first and most important dimension of career adaptability – a person must have an interest in their career or a 'future orientation' (Savickas 2013, p. 159) in order to begin to prepare for a career. The second dimension, career control, follows on from this. By control the theory conceives intrapersonal self-regulation – control processes within the individual that enable vocational development – 'the processes of being conscientious, deliberate, organized, and decisive' (p. 160). The third dimension, career curiosity, refers to the exploration of and reflection on various work options and life experiences. Finally, the fourth dimension of adaptability resources is career confidence. This reflects the need for individuals to believe they can do something successfully as a prerequisite to considering attempting it in the first place. This notion of self-efficacy as essential in the development of a satisfying career is reflected widely elsewhere in the literature (e.g. Brown and Lent 1996, Blustein et al. 2008, Hodkinson 2008).

Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994) adapt Bandura's social cognitive theory for use with career choice counselling, and propose SCCT. In order to help clients determine and pursue career paths, they examine how people choose some career options, and discount others. At the centre of their theory lies the roles of self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. They set about asking questions around whether individuals believe they have the ability to do a job, e.g., my aptitude for maths is/is not good enough to pursue a career in computer programming, and what, if any, barriers they envisage would hinder entry into that career area e.g. there are few programming jobs in my region, those jobs are going to younger people, etc. Those barriers could be real or perceived, and either way can have a powerful impact on career decision-making processes (Brown and Lent 1996). 'SCCT suggests that occupational and academic interests develop primarily from self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations' (Brown and Lent 1996, p. 355).

According to a 2013 article Lent and Brown acknowledge that these models look largely at the content of ways of acting and they aim to add a model to SCCT that integrates process. They focus on adaptive behaviours that people use, and the impact of factors both within the individual and in their environment, that help or hinder the use of adaptive behaviours. Lent and Brown look at 'positive functioning and resilience' in the context of change, whether that change is planned or unplanned (2013, p. 559). Specifically, they define adaptive career behaviours as 'behaviours that people employ to help direct their own career (and educational) development' (Ibid). They adapt Super et al.'s (1996, cited in Lent and Brown 2013) general developmental framework to use the five developmental phases of life, and identify career adaptive behaviours potentially developed or used during those phases. The phases identified are growth (child, student), exploration (adolescent, student), establishment (worker), maintenance (worker) and disengagement / reengagement (retiree, leisurite) (Lent and Brown 2013, p. 560).

The adaptive behaviours identified in these phases fall under two larger conceptual groups. The first group are the relatively normative behaviours identified with developmental phases. For example, in the Growth phase adaptive career behaviours include 'developing social skills and developing preliminary work-relevant interests and values' (Lent and Brown 2013, p. 560). In the Exploration phase an example is 'exploring possible career paths' (Ibid). The second group of behaviours include what they term 'coping skills and processes' (Lent and Brown 2013, p. 561) which are behaviours associated with periods of transition, either anticipated like the school to work transition, or unexpected, like job loss or conflict at work. A couple of examples of behaviours identified here during the Establishment phase are

'managing work-family-life conflicts' and 'engaging in self-advocacy / assertion' (Lent and Brown 2013, p. 560).

Lent and Brown posit that adaptive career behaviours can be learned, but those behaviours are influenced by personality traits, environmental supports or barriers, and social cognitive factors, notably self-efficacy. They caution that the relationship between demonstrating adaptive behaviours, and achieving desired outcomes can be a weak one, when environmental factors, e.g. economics, are non-conducive. People might demonstrate very strong adaptive behaviours and yet be unable to realise their career ambitions. Again, Lent and Brown look at influences on adaptive career behaviour and divide the influences into proximal antecedents, distal antecedents and experiential sources. Proximal factors include cognitive-person factors, contextual and personality factors, and the role of interests and abilities. Particular emphasis is again given to self-efficacy, a cognitive-person factor which 'refers to personal beliefs about one's ability to perform particular behaviors or courses of action' (Lent and Brown 2013, p. 561).

The relationship between self-efficacy expectations and outcome expectations lies at the centre of Lent and Brown's model of career self-management. More broadly SCCT, and more broadly still social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986), asserts that people are more likely to engage in behaviours when they feel capable and when they envisage the behaviour will achieve the desired outcome – can I do it, and if I do it will it get me to where I want to be? This then is the central relationship between self-efficacy and outcome expectation. In addition, contextual and personality factors can strengthen or weaken self-efficacy and/or outcome expectation. Distal antecedents include variables such as gender, ethnicity, educational quality and socio-economic background (Lent and Brown 2013, p. 563).

Swanson and Woitke (1997) define barriers as 'events or conditions, either within the person or in his or her environment, that make career progress difficult' (p. 434, cited in Brown, Lent and Hackett 2000, p. 39). Barrier perception, and the presence of barriers are not necessarily the same, so for example it may be more difficult as we get older to grasp complex maths, but an individual's self-efficacy beliefs are likely to influence to what extent they consider this a barrier to learning new maths at a later age. Brown, Lent and Hackett (2000) emphasise that the extent to which enabling environments, and inhibiting environments are interpreted by individuals can differ greatly. So one woman may see a male dominated ICT sector and may consider this an inhibitor to an ICT career, while another woman may see the same environment, and not consider this as an inhibitor.

3.5 Relationality

Blustein (2011) asserts that in a work context, as in other contexts, it is through relationships that individuals derive meaning. He adds that 'for people without as much choice… the relational connections are profoundly important for the development of work life that is dignified, matters and has meaning' (p.4). Schultheiss (2006) argues that perceived boundaries between work and family do not reflect 'the lived experience of working people' (p. 334). In reality there is an interdependence of family life, work and people's vocational development. Richardson (2012) outlines four major social contexts within which people construct lives. The social contexts are: market work, personal care work, personal relationships and working relationships. She defines market work both as the work that people do in education spheres to prepare for paid work, and the paid work that people undertake in the public sphere. Given the increase in internships and unpaid work placements in the public sphere, the unpaid work that people engage with in preparation for paid work could be included in the definition of market work.

According to Richardson personal care work 'encompasses work that is done to care for the self, for dependent others, for relationships, and for communities in personal lives' (Richardson 2012, p. 191). Richardson identifies personal relationships, with friends, partners, children, parents, siblings etc., and market work relationships, with colleagues, bosses, mentors, teachers etc. Richardson advocates for career counselling that supports 'the construction of lives through work and relationships' that are psychologically healthy, encompassing the four social contexts of people's lives, rather than career counselling that focuses on adaptation to a changing work environment. In an earlier paper (2002) Richardson posited that career practice 'has focused too exclusively on the domain of market work and has conflated the individual with that work in the old discourse of career' (p. 412).

Schultheiss (2006) looks at the literature on personal care work and market work. She concurs with Richardson saying that 'the boundaries between work and personal life are artificial ones that become obscured or disappear when we consider work embedded within the social structures' (2006, p. 335). Schultheiss synthesises the work and family literature and identifies four themes: (a) the meaning of work embedded in people's lives; (b) multiple life roles; (c) work and family navigation; and (d) supportive family systems (2006, p. 334). Blustein, Schultheiss and Flum (2004) critique existing assumptions about careers, work and relationships, and expand on the relational perspective of careers using a social constructionist analysis. 'Thus, in moving from an individualistic to relationship perspective,

one metaphorically steps out of the individual and into the space that is shared with others' (p. 427). They argue that the changing nature of career is such that it is impossible to look at work without looking at life roles that intersect with work roles.

Blustein (2011) goes on to posit that 'working is an inherently relational act' (p. 1). This is to say that all decisions and actions about work and at work are taken in the context of human relationships and 'a major objective of this theoretical project is to eliminate the artificial splits that exist in the relationship and work interface' (2011, p. 2). People are inherently social. While traditional theories of career choice and development assume a degree of autonomy and choice on the part of the individual, increasing numbers of studies (e.g. Amundson et al. 2010) acknowledge that relationships, both at work and outside of work, e.g. family, social circles, etc, play a large part in an individual's engagement with work. Blustein (2011) puts forward a number of propositions about a relational theory of working. He proposes that work, and relationships within and beyond work, have influence on each other, both positively and negatively. Notably he suggests that relational experiences shape how an individual navigates the world of work.

Here he includes that individuals are influenced by support or lack thereof in their work pursuits, and in addition are influenced by their own internalised constructions, which have been formed over time by relational experiences. So people are influenced not only by their current work situation and relationships there-in, but they approach current work and relationships based on previous experiences of work and relationships. He proposes for example that 'in the realm of career exploration, a secure base provides a mooring for individuals as they venture into new contexts and activities that may evoke anxiety' (2011, p. 9). Blustein (2011) adds that working and relationships both influence, and are influenced, by culture. How we act in the workplace, the norms and values by which we act, are both informed by our culture, and serve to inform our culture. Blustein goes on to explore the influences and potential social barriers that can influence the experience of working including cultural and racial influences, social class and gender (2011).

3.6 Narratability

Savickas et al. (2009) propose a life-designing model and include in this the ability of a person to tell or narrate a coherent career story. 'Today, it is the life story that holds the individual together and provides a biographical bridge with which to cross from one job to the next job' (Savickas et al. 2009, p. 246). This draws on the final perspective of Savickas' (2013) career construction theory – self as author – which follows on from self as actor and self as agent.

He outlines a process of constructing an identity narrative, with work or career as the central story line. He asserts that 'individuals compose a self and career by reflecting on experience, using the uniquely human capacity to be conscious of consciousness' (Savickas 2013, p. 148). Savickas argues that 'once articulated and authenticated, the career theme provides a unifying idea, that, through recurrence, makes a life whole' (2013, p. 164). Similarly, Giddens espouses a view that self-identity is constantly reflexive and 'we are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves' (1991, p. 75). He maintains that 'the individual appropriates his past by sifting through it in the light of what is anticipated for an (organized) future' (Ibid).

LaPointe (2010) explores narrative in the context of careers and 'the role of language as not simply reflecting or representing the reality but actively constructing it' (p 2). LaPointe turns to Linde who says 'narratives construct causality and continuity which are prerequisites for a sense of identity and its coherence' (Linde 1993, cited in LaPointe 2010 p. 2) She says 'to summarize, I have defined career identity as a practice of articulating, performing and negotiating identity positions in narrating career experiences' *(p. 4).* In *Narratives at work: the development of career identity*, Meijers and Lengelle posit that 'if a person has the tools to be able to re-'story' his / her identifications around work, that s/he will be more able to navigate the changing world of work, make meaning and sense of career changes, and deal more effectively with 'disorientating dilemmas' in the world of work, even seeing them as opportunities instead of setbacks and/or failures' (2012, p. 159). Narrative approaches in career counselling (e.g. Savickas et al. 2009; Meijers and Lengelle 2012; Savickas 2013; Reid 2016) have been explored in contexts to enable clients to make sense of change in their working lives.

3.7 Meaning-Making

Blustein et al. (2008) put work at the heart of the human condition - 'work is a central part of real life, a primary factor in the overall well-being of individuals, and a key to understanding human behaviour' (2008, p. 295). They outline three key functions of work in the human experience: working as a means of survival and power; working as a means of social connection; and working as a means of self-determination. Firstly, power, they argue, can be social, economic or psychological (Blustein et al. 2008). Working can provide individuals with material or social resources. Secondly, Blustein et al. emphasise the role of relationships in the experience of working (2008, p. 297). Positive relationships can help individuals negotiate work challenges and contribute to their overall sense of identity, poor relationships can impact negatively on work performance and a person's sense of

themselves. Blustein et al. (2008) identify that third function of working as a means of self-determination but they argue that in a global context very few people have the advantage of pursuing work that is inherently interesting or of intrinsic value to them. It is in the relational aspects of the work that Blustein et al. (Ibid) argue that the potential for meaning lies.

Blustein, Schultheiss and Flum 2004 posit too that meaning resides in relationships but 'how do we make meaning out of our relational experiences?' (p. 428). They seek to unpack relational meaning and draw on Josselson's relational qualities (1992, cited in Blustein et al. 2004) of embeddness and mutuality. They argue that work provides an opportunity for embeddedness in our culture, 'through work, we sense ourselves included in and part of a social meaning-making activity' (Blustein et al. 2004, p. 429). Mutuality is the quality of contributing to something beyond the self, which could vary from the everyday sharing of tasks, to a deeper, more profound sharing of experience. 'Even when done in isolation, work derives its meaning from a sense of embeddness and mutuality' (Blustein et al. 2004, p. 429). Mignot (2004) similarly argues that 'personal acts of meaning making cannot be constructed in isolation – there will always be a social aspect to their construction' (2004, p. 461).

Amundson et al. (2010) used a phenomenological approach to examine the career decision-making experiences of 17 adults who were in employment. 88% of the participants in the study described 'meaningful engagement' (Amundson et al. 2010, p. 342) as important when making career decisions. It emerged that either people tended to choose work because they felt meaningfully engaged with it, or they chose work that facilitated a lifestyle beyond the workplace that allowed for meaningful engagement. Either way, people were seeking personal fulfilment in their lives and identified work as having a central role. Meaningful engagement was connected with emotional well-being - 'happiness, enthusiasm, excitement, peacefulness, contentment' (Amundson et al. 2010, p. 342).

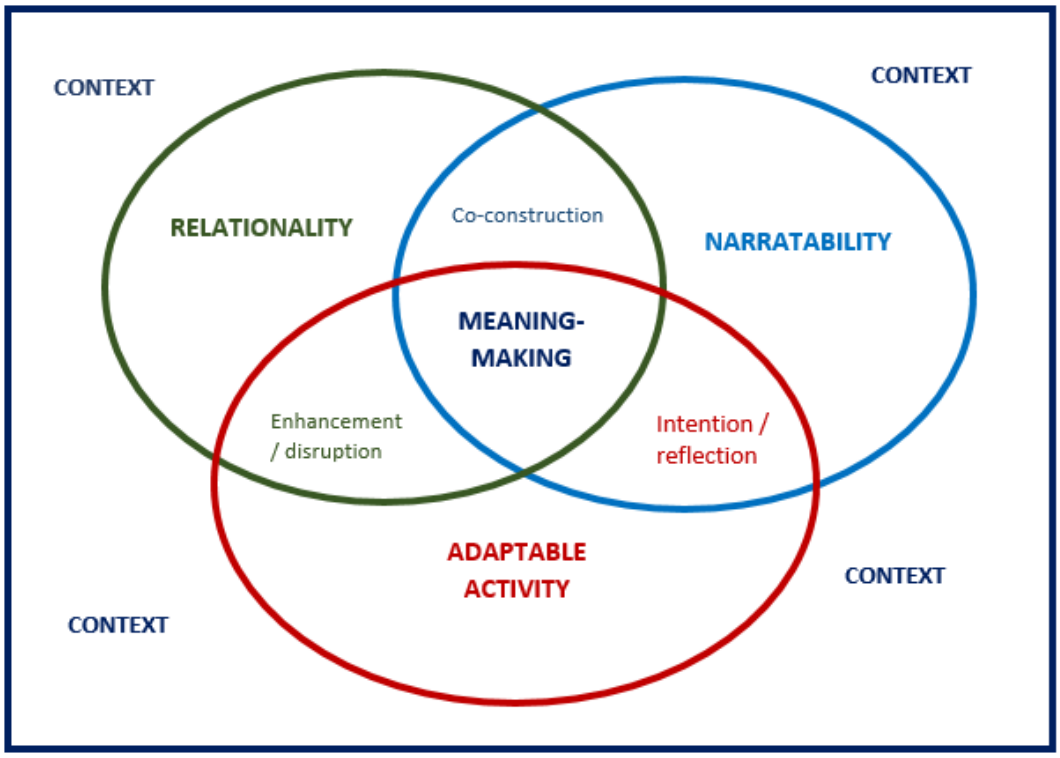
Park (2010) offers a meaning-making model which differentiates between global meaning, and situational meaning. The concept of global meaning incorporates our beliefs about the world, about our selves and about our selves in the world. It includes our goals and internalised sense of purpose. Global meaning then is our self-concept about our place and purpose in the world. Situational meaning on the other hand, 'refers to meaning in the context of a particular environmental encounter' (Park 2010, p. 258), so for example the meaning we take from a new work situation. The differentiation between global and situational meaning is made in order to illustrate the potential of situational meaning to

enhance or disrupt our global meaning. Does a particular work situation reaffirm our goals and sense of ourselves, or does it pose a threat to achieving our goals, and undermine our sense of ourselves?

3.8 Model of *Meaning-Making in Work Transitions*

Through the iterative phenomenological process of reading, writing, researching, and then reading, reflecting and rewriting, the following model was created in order to make sense of the experience under study.

Figure 6: Meaning-Making in Work Transitions



The study takes the view that people exercise choice and autonomy, however limited in the context of their world, and strive to make sense or meaning of existence. In the model then, meaning-making is in the centre, while the entire model exists in the holding space of the context. The research began with looking at the experience of people who are responding to a change in their working lives. Participants demonstrate adaptable responses and this is where the model starts, in adaptable activity. Through the data analysis, the central theme that emerges is the search for meaning, which lies at the centre of the model. As participants adapt to changes in their working lives, they continuously strive towards finding purpose and meaning in their working lives. Interwoven with adaptable tasks and activity are participants' interpersonal relationships. This includes relationships within a paid work context, in unpaid work contexts (e.g. in the home), familial backgrounds etc. Relationality and adaptable activity overlap, in that activity can be enabled or inhibited by personal relationships. This holds multiple possibilities, for example a positive mentoring relationship

can enhance a sense of belonging and satisfaction in a work place setting, negative workplace relationships can hamper or preclude the possibility of finding meaning in work. Alternatively, an emphasis on personal relationships and a commitment to caring roles outside paid work can influence the potential to navigate the paid workforce.

The third circle, narratability, represents how people create their career story into being. Relationality and narratability overlap in co-construction, as it is only in social contexts that we create our story. In so telling, we are also constructing our working life and its meaning for ourselves as well as for others. We use language in order to give our story coherence. We tell our career story in conversations, in answer to the question 'what do you do?', in formal career processes such as CVs or interviews. When we attribute meaning to our action, we either do this before we take the action, with the intention of achieving a desired outcome, or in retrospect, attributing meaning to an action in the past. This is the 'intention / reflection' overlap between narratability and adaptable activity.

All activity, relationships and sense-making are in given contexts and they each overlap. The spaces where they overlap are represented in the model, and are apparent in the analysis chapters 5 & 6. The overlap of relationality and adaptable activity is represented by enhancement / disruption. Our ability to engage in adaptable behaviour is influenced by our relationships. Both our personal and work relationships can help or hinder the possibility of re-imagining ourselves. Narratability and relationality overlap with co-construction. How we tell our career story depends on who we are telling it to, and in what context. Narratability and adaptable activity in turn overlap with intention and reflection. This represents the 'moving perspective' (Savickas et al. 2009, p.246) we create of our work story, making sense of plans and aspirations, attributing intentions to them, and of past experiences, by reflecting on them.

The model offered is a framework, intended as a tool for reflection and understanding. It is not intended to represent all the nuances of a complex reality. However, it serves to capture and put shape on the experience, and provides a tool to examine the mature intern experience in Chapter 6.

Chapter 4 - Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The study takes a phenomenological approach considering the experience of mature interns. Before looking at the origins and applications of phenomenology, its place within the context of social science will be examined. Within the social sciences there are different approaches to researching human experience, depending on how we view our social reality. Each approach is informed by underlying philosophies about the nature of reality (ontology) and the nature of knowledge (epistemology). The methodologies employed to conduct research are aligned with broader world views. At one end of the spectrum lies the positivistic tradition, or positivism, and the belief that the real world exists independently of us, and at the other, broadly referred to as post-positivism, is the belief that the world can only exist for us in so far as we understand and interpret it (Briggs, Coleman and Morrison 2012). In the positivist tradition the shared world view, or paradigm, exists that informs the assumptions and nature of positivist social science research. That paradigm asserts that reality and facts exist within the social world as they do in the natural world and these can be examined in a scientific way.

While the positivist tradition itself contains many strands, the typical methods used in research are quantitative such as surveys and questionnaires, and have as their aim to validate theoretical assertions. The post-positivist tradition, again while containing multiple strands, opposes this view that 'human behaviour is governed by general, universal laws and characterized by underlying regularities' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, p. 15). Instead, the various strands of post-positivism share the assertion that the social world can only be understood by investigating it from the viewpoint of the individuals who engage with it. This paradigm asserts that social reality is determined by those who experience it; those participants not only respond to social reality but also create it. The broader philosophical approach in this study lies within this framework of post-positivism and adopts a social constructionist analysis.

Shared principles of the post-positivist tradition include the view that reality is multi-layered and complex (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, p. 17) and that 'strategies that take the subject's perspective are central' (Briggs, Coleman and Morrison 2012, p. 23). Within the post-positivist paradigm, emphasising the experience of the individual, lies constructivism which asserts that people develop subjective meanings of their experiences, and that these meanings 'are negotiated socially and historically' (Creswell 2007, p. 25). Constructivism

and social constructionism have been applied in the career field and Young and Collin (2004) consider the ambiguities between these two approaches. They argue that constructivism 'posits a highly individualistic approach', while social constructionism has a social rather than an individual focus (p. 376). Social constructionism contends that knowledge is embedded in its context both culturally and historically, pointing to the central role of language, not in reflecting reality, but as a pre-condition for thought and comprising reality. This aligns with Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, which will be outlined in the following section, and draws influence from Foucault whose ideas are integrated into a review of the career literature. In social constructionism 'the focus of enquiry should be on interaction, processes, and social practices' (Young and Collin 2004, p. 377). This is appropriate to the context of this study, as the experience is embedded in social interaction and work practices.

Social constructionism aligns with the philosophy and methodological approach of this study. People construct meaning through their interaction with the objects and others, hence the 'social' of social constructionism. In this study, and in social constructionism more broadly, research begins with a question and through dialogue with participants, theory develops. There is a recognition within social constructionism that the researcher plays a role in determining the focus and direction of the research. The researcher is not independent of the social reality s/he examines - s/he is a part of that social reality. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) assert that 'all research is interpretive; it is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied' (p. 22). The interpretive standpoint is most often understood as existing together with qualitative research methods, including interviews, observation and ethnography.

Phenomenology is a research approach rooted in philosophical traditions, but borrows methodologies from the qualitative tradition (Van Manen, 2012) in order to gain insight into human experiences. The aim of phenomenological research is to capture an 'essence' of human experience (Creswell 2013, p. 82) in order that we may see it anew. This was the objective of Husserl, the philosopher who laid the foundations of phenomenology (Moran 2002). Two key phenomenological approaches are interpretive (e.g. Van Manen 1990, 2004, Smith & Osborn 2008, Smith et al. 2009) and psychological (e.g. Moustakas 1994, Giorgi & Giorgi 2008). Psychological phenomenology focuses predominantly on descriptions of participant experience and less on researcher interpretation of that experience (Creswell 2013). This study draws on interpretive, or hermeneutic phenomenology rather than the psychological phenomenological tradition. It is the intention of the work, not just to present the participant experience, but to offer an interpretation of that experience.

Cohen et al. state that 'hermeneutics focuses on interaction and language; it seeks to understand situations through the eyes of the participants' (2011, p. 32). It was Heidegger, Husserl's immediate successor, who combined hermeneutics with phenomenology (Smith et al., 2009). The ideas of Husserl and Heidegger are multiple and complex, but those most pertinent to the application of hermeneutic phenomenological methods in this study are outlined below.

4.2 The Development of Phenomenological Thinking

At the beginning of the last century, German philosopher Husserl developed key concepts that would become the foundations of phenomenology. Among these were the idea of intentionality – that all consciousness is of or about something; essence – that each experience has a unique quality or a 'what it is'; and 'bracketing', or in his terminology 'epoché' – that the researcher recognises and puts aside his or her own personal history and values, as well as theoretical knowledge of the experience under study. Furthermore, for Husserl phenomenology is the study of consciousness, or the study of 'the essence or essential structure of consciousness' (Cerbone 2008, p. 14). He is not interested in the science of brain function, rather he considers consciousness to be that which is experienced. And so the essence or essential structure he refers to focuses on experiential processes.

Husserl is concerned with the 'intentionality' of experience (Cerbone 2008 p. 16); consciousness is always of or about something. The essential structures of experience are those structures that experience must have in order to have intentionality. So we ask what is our experience?, we do not ask why do we experience it in this way, or whether this is the right or wrong type of experience. In order to avoid reflection and judgement in the description of experience, Husserl advocates 'phenomenological reduction', that is a 'pure' description of the experience, setting aside personal knowledge, experience and bias. The idea is that this purified account will reveal the essence of the experience. We do not look at why we experienced something in a particular way, we avoid judgement.

An additional concept that Husserl explores is the categorial nature of experience – each experience involves a fact, or an independent reality and so he terms it as categorial. Husserl acknowledges that each experience has an objective element – for example the cup exists beyond my experience of it, and a subjective element – I perceive the cup from my own subjective experience. It is an I♥NY cup, but I can only partially see the cup – the handle, the red ♥ and the Y are visible to me at this angle, but I perceive the cup as a whole. Husserl termed this as synthesis, whereby observing a part, we perceive a whole, we fill in the gaps.

Heidegger was a student of Husserl and filled his position at the University of Freiburg when Husserl retired in 1928. Heidegger's key work is *Being and Time* which was published in German in 1927. In this Heidegger uses the term Dasein to describe 'being', not just the human being or the individual, though it includes that, but to include all else that exists beyond the individual – 'being is everywhere, being is' (Inwood 1997, p. 21). So, the house, the town, the grey sky are all included in Dasein. What is included too is my own existence and how I experience the house, the town, the grey sky. Being for Dasein exists for human beings in a way it does not exist for other entities, because of our awareness of our own existence - 'Dasein is an entity for which, in its Being, that Being is an issue' (Heidegger 1962, p. 236). The 'issue' relates closely to potentiality. We can choose how we are, because Dasein can create its own ways of being. Heidegger refers to these ways of being as existentials. We have the freedom to choose our own response.

However, Heidegger does not presume that Dasein can be whatever it wants to be – 'circumstances place restrictions' (Inwood 1997, p. 25). Heidegger identifies that responses too may not be freely chosen in a way that is true to Dasein's being, but rather the choice may follow convention. Here Heidegger identifies between authentic and inauthentic. The authentic way of being is true to Dasein and its own being. The inauthentic is to follow others or the 'they', to be the 'they-self' (Heidegger cited in Inwood 1997, p. 27). However, the 'they-self' is a common state of being for Dasein. We conform in order to be – I speak the same language as those around me in order to be understood.

Heidegger differentiates between objects that are *zuhanden*, 'ready-to-hand', like the I♥NY cup, it is a cup that I use regularly for coffee, an object like many others that I use in the course of my day without considering them or their 'thingness'. When I stop to think about the cup it becomes *vorhanden* 'present-at-hand'. I remember the moment when I bought it at Penn Station in New York last summer. I was with my 11 year old son and we were leaving New York to take a train to Philadelphia. 'A phenomenology of things of our world concerns itself with the nearnesss and distance in the way we position things and they position themselves' (Van Manen 2014, p. 108). However Heidegger points out that our ordinary acts of seeing and touching, are already acts of meaning. They already have significance, we do not hear the cry of a baby or the bark of a dog as an abstract noise sensation, the noise has significance for us already. In Heidegger's words:

> When as assertion is made, some fore-conception is always implied; but it remains for the most part inconspicuous, because language already hides in itself a developed way of conceiving.

cited in Moran 2000, p. 235

Heidegger then, outlines that our engagement with the world is interpretive, or hermeneutical (Smith et al. 2009). Cerbone (2008) explains it thus; 'as *hermeneutical*, Heidegger's phenomenology is inherently *circular,* as it makes explicit what is implicit, which thereby affects what was until then implicit, which then requires further interpretation, and so on' (p. 30). In research the interpretation of the experience is twofold. The participant, in the telling, is all the time interpreting. The researcher in turn is analysing and interpreting. As the participant makes sense of their experience, they refer explicitly to their motivations. The phenomenological sociologist Schutz (1970) developed a theory of motivation which differentiates between 'in order to' motives, which reach into the future, and 'because of' motives which can only be grasped in retrospect, when a person reflects on experience. Concepts of hermeneutics are essential when approaching the data analysis, and will be referred to in Section 4.3.2.

Moran (2000) emphasises that 'it is important not to exaggerate, as some interpreters have done, the extent to which phenomenology coheres into an agreed *method,* or accepts one theoretical outlook' (p. 3). While Van Manen (1990, 2014) advocates evoking and understanding experience through the use of story, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) includes 'the meaning which is bestowed by the participant as a sense-making creature' (Smith et al. 2009, p.33). IPA analysis includes where participants reflect and give meaning to past and future activity, and draws themes through researcher interpretation of participant perspectives as well as participant experience. Van Manen on the other hand advocates removing participant opinion as he contends that participant sense-making obscures the experience itself with 'noise' (Adams 2014). Despite this, Van Manen and IPA share considerable common ground (Smith et al. 2009, p. 201). Both are concerned with the phenomenological investigation of everyday practice, and connect phenomenology and hermeneutics. Both place an emphasis on the process of writing as central to phenomenological research, using an interpretive approach through writing and reflection.

Combining both approaches offers the opportunity to look at the experience as it is told through the use of story, and to identify themes that emerge from an oversight of the full data-set and related literature. Thus, where stories emerged in the data gathering, these are analysed using the approach outlined by Van Manen in Chapter 5. Participant stories are compelling in their honesty and immediacy. They ensure that the reader remains close to the participant experience. Where participants contextualised experience within a broader

career and life narrative, this is examined thematically in Chapter 6. This allows for a more systematic interrogation of the experience. In turn this allows the reader to identify how HE support of cohorts represented by these participants might be improved. The approaches applied to data gathering and analysis are outlined in Section 4.5.

4.3 Ethical Considerations

Participants in the research are non-vulnerable adults. The risks that participants are exposed to in the research are low and relate to issues of confidentiality and protection of data during collection and storage. These issues are dealt with by anonymising the research data and excluding any identifying statements. Ethical approval for the project was granted from DCU in June 2014 (Appendix D). An application for ethical approval was made to the research committee of WIT and granted in May 2015 (Appendix E), as the cohort of participants were recent graduates or current students at WIT at the time of interview. A panel interview was undertaken as part of this ethical approval process, and the potential threat to those participants with whom I had a lecturer / student relationship was addressed.

To ensure that graduates would not feel obligated to take part in the research, a gatekeeper was used to issue an invitation to participate. The WIT Springboard work placement co-ordinator sent an initial invitation, together with a plain language statement (Appendix B) outlining the purpose of the research and the commitment involved in participation. A follow up reminder was sent by the work placement co-ordinator ten days later. For those participants with whom I had previously had a lecturer /student relationship, the module results were known and a period of six months had elapsed prior to the interview taking place. In order to differentiate between my role as a lecturer and my role as a researcher, all correspondence related to the research was issued to participants from my DCU student email account, as opposed to my WIT staff email account. Participants were reminded that involvement in the research is voluntary and were advised that they could withdraw from the research at any time. Signed participant consent forms (Appendix C) were obtained in advance of interviews.

When choosing suitable interview times and venues for interviews Van Manen's advice on facilitating an atmosphere for a rich and fruitful conversation was heeded (2014). Attention was paid to conducting interviews where it best suited the participant. Half of the participants chose to meet on the WIT campus which worked well as it was in June, following undergraduate examinations, the campus was quiet, meeting rooms freely available and the environment familiar. Six of the participants chose a café or hotel lobby convenient to them

and one participant chose to conduct the interview at her home. The times of the interviews varied to suit participants with, morning for some, and evening for others. To ensure honesty and accuracy, interviewees were offered the opportunity to check transcriptions for accuracy.

4.4 Research Journal

A research journal was used throughout the research process. Reflective journaling in research can serve multiple purposes, the first is developing writing as a way of thinking and learning (Murray 2006, Moon 2006). Phenomenology requires reflection, which can best take place on the page where rereading and consideration can deepen reflection. Journal writing can help to tease out complex theory and its application in the context of the research, it is often in writing that we achieve understanding. A research journal serves as a tool towards better understanding and insight.

A research journal can also encourage critical self-reflection (Moon 2006). We often do not recognise what we take for granted, we first need to examine our values and assumptions for ourselves. Before we make explicit our understandings and assumptions to others, we need to make our own tacit knowledge explicit (Schön and Argyris, 1974) through critical self-reflection. Through the research journal I engage in continuous self-critique and self-appraisal, in order to examine how my own experience and attitude has influenced the various stages of research. It is then that 'bracketing' those assumptions is possible and I can adopt a phenomenological attitude. Dowling (2007) refers to the epoché as 'the researcher examining their prejudices' (p. 136) and it is most useful to articulate this examination when writing, rereading writing and drawing meta-reflections. Thus, the 'bracketing' first advocated by Husserl is achieved. That is to 'put to one side, the taken-for-granted world in order to concentrate on our perception of that world' (Smith et al. 2009, p. 13). An example of reflective writing that examines my internalised messages around work is included as Appendix G.

The research journal offers an explicit research trail (Ortlipp 2008) to the reader as part of the study. It is inevitable that I bring my own 'life world' (Giorgi and Giorgi 2008, p. 29) to the research, in other words that I bring my own experience of life-long learning, and changing career to the study, but by making these explicit in a research journal I can engage in the practice of 'bracketing' that helps to surface researcher cultural or gender biases. The keeping of a reflective research journal aligns with the principles of reflective practice which

include a stepping back from events and a discourse with the self about our role within them (Hatton and Smith 1985) and a recognition of the role of emotion in experience (Moon 2006). Molander (2008) asserts that while 'reflection is not an aim in itself, reflection is not self-validating or self-justifying, an activity that does not include reflection is unlikely to be a learning activity' (p.21). An example of how the research journal facilitated the emergence of the theoretical model proposed in this research is included in Section 4.6.3.

4.5 Phenomenological Research Methods

4.5.1 Data Gathering

Van Manen advocates capturing stories of the experience under study, without the participants' opinions or views on that experience. For example, if the study is about the phenomenon of what is commonly known as 'writer's block', or being unable to put ideas down on a page, the interview data does not include why the potential writer felt they could not in fact write or make reference to how s/he feels about writing in general. It does include what that felt like in that moment, what were the circumstances and what happened? So just now, I could not write, I felt weary and confused by all the ideas open on my desk, journal articles, books, handwritten notes, the laptop monitor etc. The desk was cluttered. I felt I would never grasp the multiplicity of ideas that exist and could inform this research. I felt a sort of physical pain, an incapacitation, there was a mild pain in my forehead. I turned from the computer screen, picked up my pen and wrote about this in my research journal. Then I realised I was hungry and a little cold, and I went and made some lunch and put the heater on to warm the room. This presentation of the Lived Experience Description (LED) of writer's block, the story of the experience, constitutes the data gathered for the study.

It is this type of lived experience description that Van Manen describes as the raw data for phenomenological enquiry. Phenomenology attempts to capture lived experience, the pre-reflective 'now' of a moment. This in itself is an impossibility, as soon as a moment has passed, it is impossible to relive it in its completeness. For example, when we recall the introduction to a colleague on the first day on a new job, we are reflecting on a moment in the past. We may have come to know the colleague well, time has passed and we are looking back through the lens of our experience. However, Van Manen argues that phenomenology can retrospectively recover moments; while the 'now'-ness has inevitably passed, it is possible to close in on the moment and identify what it is that makes it unique. 'A lived experience has a certain essence, a quality that we recognize in retrospect' (Van Manen

1990, p. 36). In the interview data, participants recounted stories and recovered moments that were meaningful to them. These stories are analysed in Chapter 5.

In addition to participant stories, narrative extracts from literature are presented and analysed. Ciocan and Popa (2007) posit that 'literature is just as concerned as phenomenology at grasping essences and meaning' (p. 10). Fictional lived experience descriptions that align with participant experience are presented and discussed. Literature has the power to bring awareness and understanding, not just at an intellectual level, but at an emotional empathetic level. Van Manen (2014) advocates that 'through a good novel, we are given the chance of living through an experience that provides us with the opportunity of gaining insight into certain aspects of the phenomenon that we have chosen to study' (p. 319). The literary passages included as data aim to do this, and are taken from novels by George Eliot (1861), Leo Tolstoy (1869, 1878), Thomas Hardy (1874), James Joyce (1924), Virginia Woolf (1927) and John McGahern (1990).

These are books I have read and reread over time and the chosen passages resonate with the nature of experience described by participants. Barthes (1981) talks about the element in a photograph that calls his attention, and terms this the *punctum*. The literary passages identified hold this punctum for me. Millière (2008) describes punctum as 'a detail that accidentally disturbs, arousing all sorts of feelings – sympathy, recognition, repellence – difficult to analyse but characterized by their intensity' (p. 65). The literary passages reveal aspects of experience with that intensity so that during the research process, when I read and reflected on participant experience, the descriptions of experience from literature were brought to mind. Barthes (1981) suggests that punctum can best be revealed later after the initial reading of an image, or in this case a novel, in the memory of it when 'a detail arises of its own accord' (p. 53). Literature provides LEDs to help deepen our understanding of the phenomena. Fictional LEDs are free from participant views and opinion, and capture the 'now' of the experience.

It is most common however, when people recount experience that they include opinion, views and interpretations, they reflect as they recall the experience. Following an exploratory conversation in November 2014 with a Springboard graduate, the challenge that Van Manen describes of gathering a raw, pre-reflective lived experience description became evident. The graduate was inclined to contextualise and offer opinion in addition to recalling

specific detailed moments in her overall experience as a mature student. Reflecting on this conversation, what came to the fore was how we create meaning for ourselves in the telling of experience. As soon as we begin to speak about events or episodes, we are making some sense of it, reflecting on it and weaving it into a story. The isolated moment becomes part of a bigger pattern - sense is made of the part by placing it within the whole. It was decided to integrate into the study the broader context and narrative that participants include in their stories. In order to do so, analytical methods from IPA are integrated into the study. Chapter 6 presents this thematic analysis.

Smith et al (2009) advocate the use of interviews and diaries as optimum ways of gathering 'rich, detailed, first-person accounts' (p. 56). When designing the research, the use of research participant diaries was considered. The challenges anticipated were the additional demand on participants' time and commitment, and the issue of accessing the pre-reflective accounts that are desired for phenomenological research. The interview represents a time-bound commitment on the part of the participant and allows the researcher an opportunity to guide the participant towards maintaining focus on the immediate phenomenological experience. While interviewing is an appropriate phenomenological data collection method and the one chosen for this study, this does not preclude the use of journals in my own future research.

In order to prepare for the interviews, I attended a two-day workshop at the DCU Qualitative Summer School in 2015, with Dr Katherine Davies on creative interviewing. Following this I integrated the technique of asking participants to sketch rough office plans of their work placement environment at the outset of the interview. Smith et al. describe the qualitative interview as 'a conversation with purpose' (2009, p.57). The pencil drawing provided an entry point to experience, and eased the pressure of conversation. Silences were more comfortable as the gaze rested on the drawing while participants considered their stories.

Smith et al. advocate preparing questions that are open and expansive (2009, p. 59). The purpose is to gather participant experience without a predetermined agenda. This approach was taken in the creation of an interview schedule with questions beginning with 'tell me about' (Appendix A). During the phenomenological interview, it is important that the participant does the talking, and that questioning is guided, not only by the interview schedule but by 'attentive listening to what your participant has to say' (Smith et al. 2009, p. 64). At times this meant that the conversation covered areas that, for the participant, were relevant to the placement experience, while not directly related to time on placement. The

interview schedule was limited to ten questions, and these were learnt, so as to avoid referring to the questions during interview. This again was useful in creating a natural conversation with participants, making it possible to remain attentive without referring to pieces of paper.

Van Manen (2014) offers some practical advice on how LEDs may be captured. The interview, while recorded, can be conducted as a conversation, and good conversations require the right place and time, for example perhaps in an informal setting, or perhaps in the evening. The researcher needs to demonstrate an open disposition, while openness of attitude is advocated through the epoché, it also needs to be manifested in the researcher's personal approach to the conversation - the interviewee needs to feel comfortable in sharing their personal story. The researcher must adopt a stance of openness to the experience, suspending preconceptions or values they may bring to that experience in order to engage with the experience as it presents itself. Patrick Kavanagh's poem 'Advent' resonates here, where the poet is describing the loss of a sense of awe about the world that comes with knowledge and experience, he articulates it as 'Through a chink too wide there comes in no wonder'. He remembers 'the newness that was in every stale thing when we looked at it as children' and expects to have this sense anew following the period of Advent (the weeks of fasting that precede Christmas in the Catholic tradition). He describes how a renewed sense of wonder will be present in January:

> O after Christmas we'll have no need to go searching
> For the difference that sets an old phrase burning-
> We'll hear it in the whispered argument of a churning
> Or in the streets where the village boys are lurching.
> (Kavanagh 1969)

The idea of epoché is that the researcher adopts a phenomenological attitude, one of a fascinated tourist, where the depth that exists in all human experience is recognised anew, 'wherever life pours ordinary plenty' (Ibid). It is through the use of the research journal, sketches, attentive listening and the openness of the époché that the raw data which the research question demands is effectively elicited.

4.5.2 Data Analysis

According to Heidegger, in phenomenological research the essence of an experience is inevitably expressed and shared through language. 'Lived experience is soaked through with language' (Van Manen 1990, p. 38). We construct our experience in and through language,

both to ourselves and to others. Language cannot be separated from experience but rather it is intertwined with and lends meaning to experience. But language is not experience as action and experience exists outside of language. What text and language attempt to do is capture and communicate the essence of experience. Hermeneutic phenomenology offers not only a description of an experience, but also an interpretation of its meaning (Creswell 2013).

> A good description that constitutes the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way.
> (Van Manen 1990, p. 39)

The researcher seeks to interpret the experience, to find meaning and to gain insight or to show to us anew the unique nature of the experience under study. Insight is something grasped at a cognitive level and at an emotional level. The interpretive standpoint seeks to 'understand the subjective world of human experience' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, p. 17) but phenomenology does not simply look to give voice to the individual subjective experience, it rather seeks essence of an experience shared by multiple individuals.

Smith et al. propose that interviews tend to move between 'sequences that are primarily narrative or descriptive, and those where the participant is more analytic or evaluative' (2009, p.59). This is the case in the data gathered, so that for the narrative sequences, the approach advocated by Van Manen is applied, and for the more analytic and evaluative phases, the IPA approach is used. Recordings of the interviews were taken both on a professional recording device, and on a mobile phone. This allowed the replaying of interviews easily in the car while journeying to and from work. Repeated listening to the interview data allowed attentive listening to the experience as it is presented, prior to the identification of themes.

Initially LEDs or stories where they emerged were identified and analysed and a 'macro thematic reflection' (Adams 2014) was conducted. This involves giving the piece a title, often by identifying the most salient statement given by a participant. This 'invivo' approach of staying close to the participant text is a technique to maintain 'how the world shows up to us' (Adams 2014) or as Husserl articulated to get 'back to the things' (Husserl 1982, p. 252 cited in Cohen et al. 2011, p.18). A more micro-thematic reflection came on further reading, identifying what it is about the experience that gives it its essence. In order to achieve this, a guided existential reflection is used to examine the LEDs in Chapter 5. This involves looking at the description on five dimensions; lived time, or temporality; lived bodies, or corporeality; lived space, or spatiality; lived self/other, or relationality and lived things, or

materiality and sensual reflection (Van Manen 2014). All dimensions are always present in an experience, and these five dimensions provide a framework for examining the LEDs.

Exegetical reflection involves a critical, sensitive and creative reading of related texts, in order to cultivate insights. These texts may be other phenomenological studies, theory or fictional works that focus on the phenomenon. 'Grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of 'seeing' meaning that is driven by the epoché and the reduction' (Van Manen 2014, p. 320). Van Manen also advocates being open to multiple sources of inspiration that may offer alternative ways of understanding the phenomena, or to 'see' meaning (2014, p. 325). These may include literature and conversations. By looking beyond academic texts and research data for LEDs, 'the rich ground and experiental soils of human existence are being mined, ploughed, and seeded for phenomenological insights' (Van Manen 2014, p. 311). In Chapter 5, together with participant stories, related excerpts from literature are integrated into the discussion, as insight cultivators (Van Manen 2014). The identification of related LEDs from literature forced a creative reconceptualization of the experience and enhanced an openness to the LEDs.

The LEDs form a small portion of the fourteen hours of interview tape recorded. For the remainder of the data, an analytical approach outlined by Smith et al. was applied. The interview data were printed in column form, with two blank columns to the right of the data. The first blank column was for close line by line analysis of the data and initially the analysis remained close to the text, identifying the things that mattered to participants, and the meaning of those things to participants. Alongside this, descriptive comments were made, taking in the context of the experience, and linguistic comments, identifying participants' use of language and metaphor. This process was the lengthiest and most challenging of the research journey. Upon revisiting the transcripts and notes, more conceptual comments were made, informed too by a cognisance of the overall data set. It is from these comments, exploratory in nature, that the third column, with emergent themes, developed. Separate files of transcript extracts were created, for each emergent theme. This helped to 'look at the internal consistency, relative broadness, or specificity, of each emergent theme' (Smith et al. 2009, p. 99). From these themes, writing developed - for example, literature was revisited and Chapter 3 rewritten. Themes were merged or edited, depending on the consistency of the theme across the data-set. Chapter 6 – Thematic Analysis, outlines the themes identified, and offers excerpts from the data to support these themes.

4.5.3 Emergence of the Model of *Meaning-Making in Work Transitions*

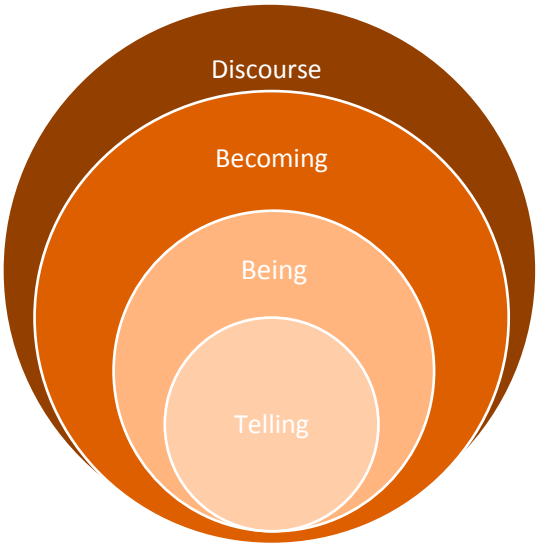
In the initial proposal for the study, literature in the domain of identity and career was examined. Later, having analysed the data, emergent themes are identified. The literature was then revisited and the Chapter 3 rewritten. There is a cycle of analysis, writing, revisiting the literature, further analysis and writing and so on. With the research journal as a tool I examine my response to the literature, the interview process and the data analysis. In the first instance it is helpful to reflect on the reading and writing process and help towards gaining a sense of wonder around the phenomenon under study. Giorgi and Giorgi (2008) suggest that 'to bracket does not mean to be unconscious of these other sources but rather not to engage them so that there can be no influence from them on the instance being considered' (p. 33). Extracts of the research journal are presented here to trace the iterative journey from the original lens of the research, through to the proposed model of *Meaning-Making in Work Transitions*.

In September 2015 I write 'How does what we do for a living inform our identity? In the career literature I haven't come across anything that adequately addresses this' (Reflective Journal p.225). Here, I am grappling with the concept of construction of the self, and co-construction in the workplace and wider society. I have not named this yet as the theme of context. Later, in 2016 I write, 'one key theme is the dynamic between structure and agency, how much autonomy do we exercise in our work decisions, and in our broader career decisions? My feeling is that our autonomy is limited and more limited in the context of economic recovery which is very slow in the region' (Ibid). Through data analysis and reflection, I was prompted to examine the ideas of Foucault and Butler, to frame the analysis within the social, cultural and political contexts.

Similarly, on reading LaPointe (2010) I write, 'this approach she takes is very interesting as she looks at how people are telling the story of their career, along with the story itself, which would be very useful in the analysis of the interviews' (Reflective Journal p.228). It was here that I could sense a synergy between the hermeneutics of phenomenology and a framework offered by career theory. Later, having conducted further interviews in May 2016, I again write that 'the idea of dramaturgy, and how we construct our lives through narrative resonates and there's a space for that certainly' (Reflective Journal p.231). It is through a dialogue between the interview analysis and revisiting literature such as Savickas et al. (2009) that narratability emerged as a circle in the model.

The concept of adaptable activity also emerged repeatedly in the participant experience. In May 2016 I return to the primary question in my journal 'What is it like to be a mature intern? Need to identity the themes that emerge, adaptability is a key one' (Research Journal, p.234). Approximately midway through the analysis process, the proposed framework included; discourse, becoming, being and telling – drawing on Savickas' Career Construction Theory (2013), as illustrated in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7: Draft Model During Analysis Phase



The above model took account of context (referred to here in the draft model as discourse) and narratability, but the concepts of becoming and being did not offer enough flexibility for adaptability in work transitions as a mature adult. It also did not allow for integrating concepts of purpose and meaning-making, which I had been referring to in my journal since the first interviews in 2015. In September 2015 for example, I write 'well-being is a part of identity that I'm interested in. How can we feel aligned with who we are, and fulfilled in what we're doing, where does work fit into our lives? The relational stuff does fit in here – that work decisions are made in the context of our full lives' (Research Journal, p.225). By July 2016, I revisit the data looking at meaning, 'sense of meaning and purpose at work – I started with this and it is very positive' (Research Journal, p.241).

It was through repeated cycles of reading, analysis, reflection and writing that the model of *Meaning-Making in Work Transitions* emerged. This is consistent with the phenomenological approach. Insight is gained through the interpretation of the data, both

through an overview of the larger dataset, and through reading and interaction with related theory and literature (Van Manen 2014; Smith et al. 2009).

4.6 Scope and Justification of a Phenomenological Approach

Increasing numbers of studies examine student work placement experience including Buckley and El Amoud's study in 2010, which quantified the number and structure of placements undertaken at undergraduate level in HE in Ireland, though this did not include the experience of more mature cohorts. Other studies include examining the value of 'soft skills' gained on placement versus discipline specific technical skills (Andrews and Higson 2008, Hall, Higson and Bullivant 2009); the impact of placement on undergraduate students' final year performance (Green et al. 2012); and measuring the career benefits of a year-long placement (Moores and Reddy 2012). Phenomenological study does not attempt to give a more genuine version of reality than these largely quantitative studies, rather it gives another perspective. It does not replace other forms of knowledge, rather it attempts to provide a sort of knowledge that other methodological approaches do not tend to seek in the first instance.

Savickas (2015), addressing the research needs of emerging career paradigms asserts that 'this pattern for practice moves away from quantitative methods to measure individual differences, to embrace qualitative methods with which to study the experience of individuals in cultural context' (p. 140). The capturing of a shared experience through phenomenological study, is something that can provide understanding that we cannot otherwise access. The phenomenological approach then is an appropriate method of seeking an answer to the question, 'What is the experience of being a mature intern?' Heidegger contended that 'even if we can't do anything with it, may not philosophy in the end do something with us, provided that we engage ourselves with it? (2000, cited in Van Manen 2014, p. 69). It is in developing our sensibilities and sensitivities that the usefulness of phenomenology lies.

Van Manen posits that:

> many professions (such as pedagogy, nursing, healing, counselling) seem to require not only gnostic and diagnostic skills and specialized bodies of knowledge, but also sensibilities and sensitivities that have to do with discretionary, intuitive, pathic, and tactful capacities.
>
> (2014, p. 243).

I have engaged in reflective practice as a lecturer in recent years and feel that the aim of phenomenology, to deepen understanding as a practitioner, aligns with reflective practice. Neither have as their aim the creation of prescribed models of being and acting. Rather 'a phenomenology of practice aims to open up possibilities for creating formative relations between being and acting, between who we are and how we act, between thoughtfulness and tact' (Van Manen 2014, p.69-70).

This echoes Schön and Argyris (1978) concern with espoused theory - that which we would like to consider our way of being and acting, and theory in action - our actual way of being and acting. One of the aims of reflective practice is to narrow the gap between the two. Similarly, phenomenology aims to encourage the researcher to know something deeply, and by knowing it, change. In addition, phenomenology is open to the use of 'insight cultivators' from sources other than academic or theoretical references, and this study uses literature as a source of insight. I have been a committed reader of fiction since I could read and continue to benefit from lessons in thoughtfulness and tact learned there. In the closing pages of *To Kill a Mockingbird* Scout stands on her neighbour's porch for the first time and sees her street and the recent events of her life afresh. She muses:

> Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them. Just standing on the Radley porch was enough.
> (Lee 1960, p. 283)

The integration of literature allows us to walk in the shoes of others, recognising for ourselves what is familiar there. Our understanding then goes beyond the intellectual and we come to know and understand at a physical and emotional level.

4.7 Validity and Reliability of the Study

Critiques of qualitative methodologies point to the lack of generalizable results that such studies produce. If structured interviews are criticised for leading participants and predetermining the direction of the research, then less controlled interviews run a greater risk of lack of validity and reliability. There is subjectivity on the part of the participant on the one hand, and on the part of the researcher who is interviewing and interpreting the data on the other. To judge whether a piece of research is valid is to judge whether it accurately 'describes the phenomenon that it is intended to describe' (Briggs, Coleman and Morrison 2012, p. 81). Creswell (2013) points to strategies for validation in qualitative research which include prolonged engagement with participants to build trust and learn culture; peer review or debriefing; and clarifying researcher bias. Where possible these strategies were engaged within this research. Firstly, in terms of prolonged engagement, it

was found that where a relationship had existed previously, albeit a lecturer / student relationship, familiarity and trust were already established. This enhanced interviews, participant willingness to share their experience in an open and honest way is evident in Chapters 5 and 6. Secondly, the work benefited from peer review and debriefing by colleagues, one of whom is an experienced phenomenological researcher. Thirdly, researcher bias is addressed through the use of journalling throughout the research process.

Glaser and Strauss's offer the concept of 'credibility' (1967 cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, p. 181) as an alternative term to validity. The reader 'knows' a piece of qualitative research to be true, as it resonates with their own experience, with their own humanity. It has a credibility that confirms its validity. Van Manen describes how when a reader responds to a phenomenological study, s/he recognises meaning in the experience as though s/he already knew it (2012). It offers an awakening to insights that ring true, that resonate on a deep level beyond the cognitive, including the emotional. The insight is new, though it feels previously known. That the experience is not invented or distorted is self-evident, as the essence of it speaks to our humanity. Winter (2000: 1, cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011) argues that validity of a piece of qualitative research may consider the 'honesty, depth, richness and scope of data achieved' (p. 179). The vocative in phenomenology is the bringing of experience vividly into presence so that the reader can recognize it unreflectively (Adams 2014).

A critique of phenomenology is that is tends to aestheticise or romanticise experience. It is essential then to stay close to the text of the transcripts and not embellish the description of things as they are. Reliability refers to the consistency or replicability of a study over time (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, Briggs, Coleman and Morrison 2012) though in the context of qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba favour the notion of trustworthiness in qualitative research as a parallel to reliability (1994). Their trustworthiness criteria are credibility, that the reader has confidence in the 'truth' of the research; transferability, that the research can be applicable in other contexts; dependability, that the findings are consistent and could be repeated; and confirmability, that the research is participant rather than researcher led (Lincoln and Guba 1994, p. 114). Creswell (2013) offers standards by which he suggests assessing the reliability or trustworthiness of a piece of phenomenological research. The first is that the research demonstrates an understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of the phenomenological approach. Second, that it has a clear 'phenomena' identified, and third that established procedures of data analysis are used. Fourth is that the author is reflexive throughout the study, which is the purpose of the research journal; and

finally that the author conveys the overall essence of the experience of participants including a description of it, and its context (Creswell 2014, p. 260). These standards have been applied here, outlining the philosophy and context, and following established procedures of data analysis.

4.8 Participant Profiles

The reader will note in the presentation of findings that some participants are represented more than others in quotation extracts, and of course quotations vary in length. In the presentation of participant stories in Chapter 5, the focus is predominantly on narratives told by Kate, Marianne, Fred and Amos. These participants are given to storytelling in their conversational style and where they articulate an experience shared by other participants through the telling of a Lived Experience Description that is presented. This is to capture the essence of the common experience, rather than give voice to the individual (Creswell 2013). In the analysis in Chapter 6, themes are explored and supported via quotations from all fourteen participants. The number of times that each participant is quoted in the work is given below and while the frequency and length of quotation varies from person to person, overall an adequate variety of participant voice is offered.

Kate	9
Marianne	4
Elinor	5
Claire	7
Eithne	10
Anna	4
Beth	5
Tom	4
Fred	10
David	3
Amos	7
Joe	7
Brian	6
Seán	4

At the time of the study, participants are at various stages of continuing education or re-entering the workforce. One participant is preparing to go on placement; a further three are on placement at the time of interview; four have continued working with the placement provider but in a paid capacity and the remaining six participants have completed their placements and are either working, studying or seeking work. Seven participants undertook the programme of study in 2013 – 2014, five in 2014 – 2015, and two in 2015 – 2016. Six interviews took place in August 2015, and nine between April and June of 2016.

Two participants are in their late 20s/ early 30s but the remainder of those interviewed (12 of the 14) are aged between 35 and 49 and had reached levels of responsibility and experience reflective of more than ten years in the working world, all but one of the fourteen having gained a college qualification on leaving school. Awards held are primarily level 8 degrees or equivalent, and come from a variety of professional backgrounds including engineering (three participants), finance (three participants) and nursing (one participant), with the majority of participants (seven) holding business qualifications and experience in project management, training or administrative roles. Five of the fourteen participants in this research study are those who emigrated in the 1980s, and returned home subsequently when the economy picked up to take advantage of the opportunities presented.

All participants experienced a change in their work life which necessitated rethinking their work profiles. For many this could be termed a crisis; either redundancy or inability to find work; health issues, their own or that of someone near to them; or bereavement, which precipitated moving back to the South-East region which subsequently presented them with a challenge in finding employment. Four of the participants, three women and one man, are hoping to return to work after a period working in the home with young children but have been unsuccessful in finding jobs. Though varying in nature, the events that the participants have contended with all force a reassessment of working lives and career identities. The overarching question is what is it like to re-enter education in order to change careers through necessity? And in that context, what is it like as a mature learner to undertake an internship in a new domain?

4.8.1 Programme of Study

12 of the 14 participants within this study are undertaking or have completed the Higher Diploma in Business Systems Analysis, a one-year 60 credit programme at level 8 which was offered in WIT under Springboard from 2013 to 2016, and is again on offer under Springboard

in the academic year 2016 – 2017. The programme promotional literature states that: 'this graduate entry course is particularly suited to either business or computing graduates who wish to enhance existing knowledge and up-skill into highly employable roles in business systems and data analysis, and consequent design of systems' (WIT 2016, online). None of those interviewed who undertook this programme have a computing degree, though one has a diploma in computer science and another a certificate in software development.

For the most part modules contain new content for participants, e.g. Human-Computer Interaction and Web Design, and Database Modelling (WIT 2016, online). The programme is structured into two semesters, followed by a placement beginning in June, which is twelve weeks in duration, and accounts for 15 of the 60 credits necessary to complete the diploma. One of the participants undertook a Diploma in Computing with Security and Forensics, a one-year programme at level 7, which ran in 2014 – 2015 and 2015 – 2016. The promotional literature outlines that 'this course is designed to provide an accessible entry route into higher level study of ICT with clear progression routes into employment … and/or into further study (WIT 2015, online). Again the placement comes at the end of the programme of study and is twelve weeks in duration and accounts for 10 of 55 credits.

4.8.2 Placement Structure

Placement providers range from community organisations, research groups, start-up enterprises and private businesses. Half of those interviewed received payment for placement, while seven undertook unpaid placement. The majority of positions are sourced through a dedicated work placement co-ordinator in WIT, with specific responsibility for the Springboard ICT programmes. The placement co-ordinator holds information sessions with students prior to placement, liaises with placement providers and is available to students for support throughout their internship which includes a site visit from the co-ordinator to the place of work. In addition, each student is appointed a supervisor from the lecturing staff of the School of Science and Engineering at WIT. That support, which may include technical expertise where necessary, is available prior to the start of academic holidays on 20th June, which for the majority of this cohort was the first three weeks of their twelve-week placement. The programmes include an accredited module in 'job readiness', which addresses professional development and work placement preparation.

A tri-partite learning agreement between the student, the placement provider and the WIT supervisor is signed prior to commencement, which gives a general outline of the organisation, the nature of the placement experience, the student learning objectives, and the student's plans to achieve these objectives. At the end of the internship, students submit an applied learning portfolio, listing weekly activities, identifying and reflecting on four key learning events, and providing feedback on the overall experience. This is assessed by the WIT supervisor.

4.9 Conclusion

The research asks, what is the experience of work placement like for participants? Phenomenology aims to achieve fresh understanding of experience so as to improve professional practice. This approach aligns with the aims of this piece. The purpose of phenomenology is not however to prescribe how practice may be improved. Rather, it is to provide insight, so that the practitioner may reflect on his/her own work and integrate appropriate change to ways of being and acting.

The research was enhanced by the open approach in data-gathering advocated by the methodologies of Van Manen (2014) and Smith et al. (2009). In phenomenological data analysis, Creswell asserts that capturing the essence of experience involves a philosophical discussion around individual experience, both the 'subjective experiences of the phenomenon and objective experiences of something in common with other people' (Creswell 2013, p. 78). In this study the analysis of stories, which are subjective experiences, is followed by the identification of common themes across the data. It is through a dialogue between the data and the literature that the essence of the experience is captured.

Chapter 5 – Findings - Participant Stories

5.1 Introduction

Van Manen posits that 'the ultimate aim of phenomenology of practice is modest: to nurture a measure of thoughtfulness and tact in the practice of our professions and in everyday life' (Van Manen 2014, p.31). In order to nurture awareness and understanding, he advocates the use of story to evoke insight both at an intellectual level and also at what is termed a 'pathic' level. 'Phenomenological understanding is not primarily gnostic, cognitive, intellectual, technical but rather it is pathic, that means situated, relational, embodied, enactive' (phenomenologyonline 2016). The experiences are multifaceted and complex and it is through stories that we can reach an understanding and grasp meaning at both a cognitive and emotional level. Van Manen argues that 'stories or anecdotes are so powerful, so effective, and so consequential in that they can explain things that resist straightforward explanation or conceptualization' (2014, p.251). The experience then is presented in this chapter in the form of stories, or anecdotes from work placement and from previous work situations. Participant names are anonymised and each given a number for clarity. By presenting stories in this way, staying close to the participant language and telling of incidents, the experience is conveyed closest to how it is felt. Identification of themes comes later, in chapter 6.

In order to gather stories, or experiental material, phenomenology borrows from social science research methods, most typically through interviews, but can include 'identifying fictional experiences, and exploring imaginal experiences from other aesthetic sources' (Van Manen 2014, p.312). In this chapter, narratives from participant experience are placed alongside fictional experiences from literature. Van Manen (2014) suggests that looking at the phenomenon, in this case the work placement experience for mature Springboard interns, through the lens of universal themes or existentials can help to guide the inquiry. These are aspects of everyone's world, and can be useful in structuring analysis. The existentials are lived things and technology (materiality), lived space (spatiality), lived self/other (relationality), lived body (corporeality) and lived time (temporality) (Van Manen 2014, p.302). This approach is used in presenting and analyising the LEDS here. While each description touches on a variety of existentials because we experience life in each of the different ways, an example story is given emphasising each existential in turn.

In the reading approach to analysis, Van Manen suggests identifying a sentence, phrase or word in the text that is particularly evocative or that possesses a sense of punctum. The term punctum is taken from Barthes, and describes a point or quality that a photograph or text can acquire when we attend to it. A 'text acquires punctum when an anecdote becomes a compelling narrative example and claims the power to stir us and to bring about an understanding' (Van Manen 2014, p.253). The following LEDs are titled with a phrase in the anecdote that offers punctum.

5.2 Lived Things and Technology - Materiality

'I'm a real computer freak now'

To begin, the materiality of the experience is explored. Participants describe how they engage with what to wear and how to use the tools of their roles. These are the material elements of the workplace. For participants, they are learning IT systems, familiarising themselves with complex tasks and technology. Over time, we develop the knowledge and skill to manipulate and control the tools we use in our work. There comes a point when this becomes second nature. For example, in George Eliot's book *Silas Marner*, the weaver is so familiar and skilled at the loom that 'he seemed to weave, like the spider, from pure impulse, without reflection' (1861, p. 64). For participants, their work is not without reflection, each task requires an explicit method, a process of trial and error. The following LED describes a day at work when Fred feels that he is beginning to internalise this knowledge and skill.

> There's the days when I come home buzzing because I've done something cool and it worked, something that I've implemented. Like I remember doing a security report, it was really up my alley actually. Literally, there's a list the calls you can see and if there's anything that particularly takes your fancy, you can pull them in … [my colleague will] go, 'Yes, you can do that.' or he'll go, 'No, I need to do that because that's a very difficult call.' So they're very intuitive that way so, they're very cool. So basically, there was a person who had left the company and it was like, 'I want him not to be able to get back into our network. We want you to search everything.' So I was like, 'Grand.'
>
> So I literally started going through stuff and through stuff just locking down the system. They were happy for me to just go off wandering for an hour and look around and investigate. When it was all done I was really chuffed with myself because I found loads of things and I emailed her back and she emailed back a very pleasant email saying, 'Wow, I didn't even know this was there.' … I'm a real computer freak now. I did up a big dossier or report, made it all presentable and emailed it to her and sent it to the escalation guy. He was happy with it, she was happy and I was like, 'Woohoo!' I remember going, 'Yes!' and they were well impressed like and then the manager actually came down and asked me was there anymore students from the same course as mine because we had good knowledge in areas that they wanted.

(Fred 9, p.151-152)

Fred here describes a sense of flow, when he became absorbed with a task and made a valuable contribution to the work of his colleagues. The materiality of the experience is described when he gets lost in the world of the computer as he goes through it and finds things. He is developing a sense of ownership of a certain area of expertise – 'right up my alley', the work is meaningful to him so that he is happy to be becoming 'a real computer freak'. He demonstrates a strong sense of purpose and approaches the task methodically, taking full ownership of it, producing a dossier which was noticed by the client, his colleague and his manager, who were 'well impressed'. These are all material aspects of the work.

Relationality is explored further in section 5.4 and again in Chapter 6, but emerges in each LED as an aspect of working. Blustein et al. (2004) emphasise the relational aspects of working and argue that 'working is a type of action that requires some sharing in a socially constructed meaning' (2004, p.429). Here Fred perceives himself and his autonomy in the context of the team (relationality). He values that he is given the independence to choose problems to work on and 'to go off wandering' to explore the issue. He does not operate independently, he relies on his senior colleague's advice. He admires other members of the team with more experience and expertise, and notes their knowledge accumulated over years on the job – he calls it intuition. The impression given is one of mutual respect, he feels valued for what he brings, and he values his colleagues for what they bring. He feels that he is contributing to a shared task, and experiences a keen sense of well-being. This positivity is felt physically – 'I was buzzing', 'I was really chuffed' and 'Woohoo!' 'Yes!' (corporeality). It is through successfully contributing to a group task, even when we complete this alone, that we can experience this feeling of belonging, purpose and physical well-being.

The following excerpt is from *Anna Karenina*, the 1878 novel by Leo Tolstoy, and describes the landowner Levin, who decides to spend a day harvesting the land with the workers of his estate. Tolstoy describes Levin familiarising himself with the scythe, his desire to do the job well and to maintain pace with the other workers. In moments he achieves a rhythmic flow, when he becomes immersed in the work.

> He thought of nothing and desired nothing, except not to lag behind and to do his work as well as possible. He heard only the swishing of the scythes, and saw only the receding figure of Titus, the crescent- shaped curve of the mown piece before him, the grasses and heads of flower falling in waves about the blade of his scythe, and in the background the end of the swath where he would rest.

> Another row, and yet another row, followed—long rows and short rows, with good grass and with poor grass. Levin lost all sense of time, and could not have told whether it was late or early now. A change began to come over his work, which gave him immense satisfaction. In the midst of his toil there were moments during which he forgot what he was doing, and it came all easy to him, and at those same moments his mowing was almost as smooth and well cut as that of Titus.
>
> (Tolstoy 1878, p.309-310)

Tolstoy touches on all five existentials to describe this experience. Levin is aware of his place among the workers and is anxious to keep up (relationality); he becomes accustomed to the scythe and how it cuts through the grass (materiality); he is aware of the shape of the mowing and the end of swath (spatiality); he does not notice the morning passing (temporality); he experiences pleasure in the work (corporeality). The feeling of well-being that Fred, and the fictional character Levin experience while at work, happens when they lose themselves in the materiality of the experience, with the software or the scythe, and they feel themselves achieving good work, contributing to the objectives of the people they are working with.

In addition to working with machines, participants consider other material aspects of the work placement. They talk for example about their consideration of what to wear on the first day on the new job.

> Obviously, I didn't know. So I dressed in the middle. I didn't go in a suit because I was thinking to myself if I was sitting there and a guy walked in, in a dinner suit. I'm not doing that, but you get away with a shirt, tie and a jumper, grand.
>
> (Fred 9, p.147)

The idea of performativity (Butler 1993) relates to the routine practice of power, the habits we adopt in any given context that denote status, role, intention. Participants are navigating those routines when they re-enter the work force. The materiality of dressing in what is considered an appropriate manner within a given work culture is part of the ritual of becoming and belonging to that culture.

> Going for the interview, I had to go into the office first and I saw how they were dressed in the office. It was more casual so, that informed my decision coming in the first day. So I felt it would have been overkill if I wore a suit and tie. So I toned it down, I just put on a shirt.
>
> (Amos 11, p.177)

A relevant literary example that resonates here is the experience of Gabriel Oak, a character from Thomas Hardy's novel *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Gabriel worked his own farm until a young untrained sheepdog drove his flock into a chalkpit killing them all, and 'his hopes of being an independent farmer were laid low' (1874, online). Having settled his debts he goes to the market hoping to be hired as a bailiff, or farm manager.

> Weary of standing in the market-place, and not much minding the kind of work he turned his hand to, he decided to offer himself in some other capacity than that of

> bailiff. All the farmers seemed to be wanting shepherds. Sheep-tending was Gabriel's speciality. Turning down an obscure street and entering an obscurer lane, he went up to a smith's shop.
> 'How long would it take you to make a shepherd's crook?'
> 'Twenty minutes.'
> 'How much?'
> 'Two shillings.'
> He sat on a bench and the crook was made, a stem being given him into the bargain. He then went to a ready-made clothes' shop, the owner of which had a large rural connection. As the crook had absorbed most of Gabriel's money, he attempted, and carried out, an exchange of his overcoat for a shepherd's regulation smock-frock. This transaction having been completed, he again hurried off to the centre of the town, and stood on the kerb of the pavement, as a shepherd, crook in hand.
> (Hardy 1874, online).

This account of Gabriel's willingness to adopt a new work role demonstrates the human capacity for adaptability in the face of necessity. The adoption of a new identity for a changed situation is consistent with the writing of Foucault who stresses the link between identity forms and social contexts (Guichard 2005). Gabriel sheds his clothes and identity as a farmer and bailiff. There is no going back now as he no longer owns a coat, he has invested all he has in appropriating the identity of a shepherd to negotiate his way through the workplace market. Individuals construct themselves in social contexts - their self-concept, or identity form is constructed, enacted and continuously reconstructed within our social worlds (Young and Collin 2004). Not only that, but our ways of relating to ourselves are also socially constructed. We not only reconstruct ourselves for others, but also for ourselves (relationality).

5.3 Lived Space - Spatiality

'I pulled my chair round to sit beside her at the top of the table'

Other participants describe negotiating the power dynamic within the workplace and how this can be played out in the use of physical space. They show awareness of the spatiality of the experience. Elinor is returning to full time work after time spent at home with her children while taking on part-time roles. Previously she had worked in London for software companies and is on a paid placement as a Business Systems Analyst at the time of interview.

> Well because we were sitting in the meeting I said, 'Actually, I need to go through my standard operation procedure before you go back,' because Quality have to come from a different building and their faces fell and they went, 'Well, we can't do it right now.' and I said, 'Oh right?' and they said, 'But we'll just finish this with [a colleague] and then we'll do it.' and I said, 'Oh yeah, that's good because I really need to clear it up because you want these in my document and I don't understand

> what you want.' So I printed off what I wanted to talk to them about and (laughs) the Head of Quality had sat at the top of the table so, I pulled my chair round to sit beside her at the top of the table so that we could look at the piece of paper together. 'I don't want you to be at the top of the table, I think we need to work'.
>
> Years ago I would have been too scared to do that and I would have put up with more simplistic answers, but if I don't understand something now, 'No, I'm not clear on what you're trying to talk about. So that point really overlaps with that point there and it overlaps with that point? So all of those are actually quite overlapping with each other? Okay, once I understand.' and she said, 'Oh yeah, they are actually, but they're all coming at slightly differently angles, but they all cover one area.' 'So the ten points are actually really just two points.' Which is a bit assertive really, telling her that all the things she'd written down were really just two things instead of ten things.
>
> (Elinor 3, p.75)

Elinor offers this story as an example of how she can assert herself in a workplace context. She takes ownership of her work which is illustrated through the 'my' of the 'my standard operation procedure', it is her document (materiality). She insists on clarity, she wants to understand. This is part of the role of work, to understand in order to contribute – it is through understanding and contributing to the work of the group (relationality) that meaning is found. She shows awareness of the lived time (temporality) of this experience, the ability to demand time and clarity has come with age and experience.

She can be assertive and ensure that she is given time to go through the document. By moving her chair around to work with her senior colleague, she repositions them side by side (spatiality, corporeality). This relates again to the idea of performativity - in this case the routine practice of how power is manifested in the physical organisation of the workplace – and she is consciously challenging that power. In terms of relationality she refers to her colleagues according to what they do – 'Quality' refers to a number of people - and the 'Head of Quality' is her senior colleague. She attributes an identity form to her colleagues, they become their work roles. She expresses amusement and pleasure (corporeality) that her analysis of the document was more succinct and there is an impression of empowerment in the telling of the story.

In *Amongst Women* McGahern describes how a the neighbouring farmer comes across the field to Moran's farm and sees that the tractor is not being used to row the hay.

> He praised the work and weather and then asked, 'Why aren't you using the tedder? It'd save hours.'
> 'I just broke the pins. I never seem to be able to work it on that high ground.'
> 'Have you no spare pins?'
> 'Lots'

> He made Moran replace the broken tines while he made several small adjustments. Then he instructed Moran to spin the tines slowly and after watching them a bit made further adjustments before he was finally satisfied that they were level. 'I think it will work any ground now,' Rodden said. Moran then deliberately started to row the roughest ground while Rodden leaned on his stick watching. To Moran's disbelief the tedder worked the rough ground as if it were a table.
>
> (1990, p.163-164)

This account resonates with Elinor's in that there is a sense of crossing boundaries, of taking ownership of someone else's work and offering a better way of completing it. In both accounts there is a power dynamic of ownership and authority at play. In the above description, it is Moran's field and tractor, he is almost disappointed that the mended tedder works the rough ground, as it signifies an undermining of his ownership and authority. In Elinor's story, she takes ownership of the standard operating procedure from the Head of Quality and feels empowered by doing so.

'I was just put here at the table with the magazines'

Similarly Amos and others describe both a material and spatial awareness. As interns, they do not always have full access to resources. Amos did not have a dedicated work space for the duration of placement, and on the first day he arrived, his placement provider was not present:

> So initially, I was just put here at the table with the magazines [laughs]… it appeared he had not told the other staff that I would be coming.
>
> (11, p.177)

The lack of a work space, and to be put 'with the magazines' compromises the level of meaning it is possible to achieve in the role. To be denied a dedicated desk and chair (materiality) is to be denied a 'lived space' (spatiality) within the workplace. His relationship with his colleagues and with the task has been undermined before it has started (relationality). Fred on the other hand describes creating his own space.

> I didn't have a desk. I had an area where I was going to sit, but there was no computer, no nothing and he was like, 'First thing you do, build a computer build your own desk.' I thought it was brilliant, I was like, 'Oh my god, what?' So I built my own computer, built my own desk.
>
> (Fred 9, p.151)

Fred is given ownership and control of his work environment, his lived space is his own. The material aspects of the workplace and our place among them signify habits and ways of doing that have developed over time as taken-for-granted practices. For example, an office dress code may not be obvious and participants describe casual dress habits that surprise them on beginning placement. Over time, if permitted, participants gain access to this knowledge

and practice. They gain skills with the tools of the work. This process of gaining access, and hence empowerment, is negotiated through relationships at work.

5.4 Lived Self-Other - Relationality

'I will get to the bottom of this'

While participants are adapting to tasks and tools, they are learning the habits of interaction both with colleagues internal to the organisation, and with external clients. The following description outlines the first interaction Fred has with a client, having shadowed a colleague for a couple of weeks.

> Answering that first phone call was just like, 'holy god, what am I going to do?' The very first phone call I got was from a really irate customer that had, I can't even remember what it was, but I remember getting off, it was for some solicitor's firm and they had gone bananas because something was meant to be fixed twice and it had broken down again and she didn't understand it, she went crazy, she knew more than me, I had no idea.
>
> So I was like, 'Certainly, get escalation and get management in here and contact this and I will get to the bottom of this, no problem.' Yes, that was the first big thing. I remember getting off the phone and a couple of lads just starting applauding. I was like, 'Oh my god.' and I was in a cold sweat, I had to take time off, I was a nervous wreck. Then I was just like, 'Well nothing can be that bad. It can't be that bad.'
>
> (Fred 9, p.148)

The existential of lived self/other is primary is this account. Fred is physically anxious (corporeality) to appear professional with the client (relationality). The language he uses to reassure the client 'get escalation', 'I will get to the bottom of this' contrasts with his own 'holy god', 'they had gone bananas'. It suggests that he recognises the necessity to adopt a professional persona. He is within hearing of his colleagues (spatiality) and they are amused by the challenge he faces and his attempts to deal with it (relationality). While he is stressed by the experience, the applause of his colleagues signifies a camaraderie, an emerging belonging to the group, an initiation into its challenges.

In Chapter 3, the point is made that 'work derives its meaning from a sense of embeddness and mutuality' (Blustein et al. 2004, p. 429). Fred is beginning to experience a sense of belonging in the workplace. In War and Peace (Tolstoy 1869), Nikolai Rostov returns to his regiment and experiences a sense of purpose in his tasks, and belonging to his fellow soldiers that he compares to feeling at home with his family.

> After reporting himself to his colonel and being reassigned to his former squadron, after taking his turn as officer for the day and going for forage, after getting back into the current of all the little interests of the regiment, after taking leave of his liberty

> and letting himself be nailed down within one narrow inflexible framework, Rostov experienced the same sense of peace, of moral support, and the same sense of being at home and in his right corner as he felt under the paternal roof.
>
> (Tolstoy 1869, p. 462)

Rostov is in his 'right corner' with the troops. His comfort comes from knowing his place and tasks amongst the ranks. He feels he is contributing and in turn is valued. This gives him a sense of belonging and purpose. In these examples relationships contribute to meaning at work, though undoubtedly relationships can obstruct meaningful work as in the following example.

'He's not ready to share anything with me'

Amos completed an unpaid work placement and found the workplace relationships challenging to navigate. He has been at home with his children while his wife has been pursuing her studies. They moved from Nigeria, where he had completed a degree in agricultural economics and worked in business managerial roles through his twenties and early thirties before coming to Ireland.

> [The placement provider] asked me personally to shadow the tech guy and be able to do what he does and I was very happy to do that. I wanted the challenge. I wanted to learn. But it was extremely difficult, it was unbelievable. Just by the side, he's not Irish, he's Indian. The MD wasn't very good in managing the staff, communication wasn't very good and he doesn't tell this guy and so he's not ready to share anything with me. And I go to the MD and tell him, so he does explain to the guy, but the guy is not forthcoming at all and the MD seemed not to be able to do anything about it because- [the tech guy thought he was training me] to take his job.
>
> The tech guy restricts my access even though he's been asked to give me access, he restricts my access because he doesn't want me to see stuff, do stuff and so on. So I had to go back again, back and forth and something that should have taken an hour took weeks.
>
> (11, p.178-181)

Amos expresses an eagerness to learn and to understand. This is his first experience of the work place in Ireland and he acknowledges the different nationalities and the work culture which includes the resistance of his colleague to do what the manager asked of him (relationality). In this scenario Amos feels powerless, he goes to the MD, but to no avail. His ability to work with the system is disrupted, he is physically denied access (materiality) and something that ought to have taken hours, has taken weeks (temporality). Fred faces a challenging task but is supported by the good humour of his colleagues. Rostov feels at home in his work and with his peers. Amos however, is denied access to completing tasks. Relationality emerges as a key existential of the work placement experience – it is always in a social context. Blustein et al. (2008) outlines that the functions of work include power,

social connectedness and the facility of self-determination. Power, and access to power, and the facility of self-determination, are enhanced or disrupted by social connectedness. In the following section the experience of this in the Lived Body is explored.

5.5 Lived Body – Corporeality

'That was very exhilarating'

Looking at the corporeality of the placement experience, when participants were asked to describe a time when they felt energised while on placement, they are able to identify moments of 'buzzing' or 'fizzing'. The experience is felt in the body as a positive sensation.

> There was once we were given a project to do and we were told we would be given a free hand to implement it and that was exciting, 'Yes, let's do this.' So we started off on the project and the next couple of days coming to work was exciting, we had our own space to do our thing and do all the stuff and you know the prototypes and everything. Again, why I felt the ending was so exciting… our prototypes were so good that when we showed it to the MD the first time he felt it was the real thing. They were so good that they had some clients they were trying to get and they were using the prototypes to show the companies. Being able to do that was very exhilarating. It was satisfying, it was.
>
> (Amos 11, p.182)

In the above description Amos identifies the feeling of well-being that comes with the autonomy to implement a project. This includes having their own space to work in (spatiality) and delivering a high quality product (materiality). The positive feedback from clients is an external validation of the work (relationality) and he feels very rewarded by it. This reward is not financial, the placement in this instance was unpaid. The reward is experienced as excitement, exhilaration and satisfaction. In the *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* the character Stephen awakens to the realisation that he will be an artist. This gives him a feelings of profound joy. Again this is felt in the lived body (corporeality):

> His heart trembled; his breath came faster and a wild spirit passed over his limbs as though he was soaring sunward.
>
> (Joyce 1924, p.176)

Here Stephen feels positive bodily sensations from knowing where his contribution to the world of work lies. Just as feelings of empowerment and purpose are experienced physically, so too are feelings of disempowerment, as described by Marianne in the next section.

'I just felt like that they were all talking over me'

Marianne is undertaking an unpaid and self-directed project to create a website for a non-profit organisation. The organisation has a number of functions, and in the initial meeting

she and a peer from her programme of study are discussing what platform they ought to use to create a web presence. Her peer is to work independently on creating an online presence for another aspect of the organisation's work. The existential that comes to the fore in this account is corporeality, or lived body. She has an acute awareness of space and her own physical place in it.

> Well, John was sitting down and … we spent a few minutes chatting, talking about different things. So then the other two [placement providers] came along. So myself and John were here, I think I was standing, he was sitting and then the other two came in. So anyhow, they had their minds made up, they both wanted the same platform to be used and they both wanted something that users could use easily. So we all came back to the WordPress-. I tried to speak, I-, they were all going on about it-, I just felt like that they were all talking over me and John was kind of-, like, 'Oh yeah, we can do that, we'll do this, we'll do that.' and I was like, 'Listen, I can't really do that.'
>
> (Marianne 2, p.39-40)

Marianne talks about lived body and lived space in this description, where she is, and her lack of voice. She takes some comfort in knowing someone there, but she compares herself unfavourably with him – that he has more technical ability (relationality, materiality). She is standing while he is sitting. She has not found her place, while he has (spatiality).

She is not heard, 'I tried to speak', (corporeality) but 'they had their minds made up' (relationality). There was a mismatched expectation between what she could deliver and what they felt could be delivered. She describes feeling pressured to take on something that was beyond her ability and beyond the scope of the placement experience. She is without a mentor on placement. She has an awareness that the purpose of placement should not be taken for granted, that the meaning needs to be co-constructed, she later remarks 'we should have paid more attention to our initial decision' (2, p.40). The meeting causes her significant stress (corporeality) though she did not feel empowered to challenge the placement provider (relationality). Marianne considers 'all I'm learning is that I can't take any tablets big enough to get rid of the headache she gives me' (2, p.46). The negative work relationship is felt as physical pain.

5.6 Lived Time - Temporality

In the context of the life-span (Sugarman 2001, 2004), the majority of the research participants are mid way through their working lives. The final existential - temporality takes on a significance. In this section, in order to lead to Chapter 6 and the analysis of themes, LEDs from a participant, together with her reflections and sense-making around these accounts are presented. This introduces the themes that will be explored in more depth in

the next chapter. Kate talks about her previous work, then her placement, and finally her reflections on what she seeks from work. She frames her story by recounting the events of a pivotal day in her previous work as a nurse. She describes a power and autonomy in her role that comes with professional experience, a social connection with her peers and colleagues, and meaningful work that aligns with her interests and values.

'We'd a horrendous summer'

> I was working in intensive care and we'd a horrendous summer, car crashes, uhm, gunshot wounds, crazy off-the-wall stuff. It was very physical, emotional, everybody was extremely stressed. Did not have enough staff and no backup from the hospital. Well, it was a Saturday and I was, I think, eight and a half months pregnant, ready to go off to my maternity. This guy came in off a motorbike. Face first off a motorbike so all his damage was to the front, smashed face, smashed chest. He came up, he was stabilised, fabulous team, the nurses that were on and the doctors at the time, they were all just great. Uhm, stabilised him and there's a particular syndrome called 'respiratory distress' and everybody's always aware of it, … they stop breathing, it can be treated, but it's panic stations.
>
> There was four of us on, four very strong, well trained nurses on. We had a certain routine, we worked really well as a team and we went to turn this guy and turn him back, and his tube dislodged and we couldn't get it back into place and we phoned for the anaesthetist. We bagged him you know, manually ourselves and couldn't find anybody. One of the girls ran to theatre in case they were inside theatre, we never found out where they were. We were going crazy, so switch phoned the consultant and he came in from home, it was his weekend off, but he was there within 15 minutes. But the consultant could not get this tube back in and basically he'd gone into this syndrome so, his lungs were all swollen and they couldn't get the tube back in again, and he died. He was 26.
>
> (Kate 1, p.4-5)

The lived time or temporality of this experience is evident, it is in the past and the moments experienced then are still present now. The time of year, the day of the week, the time in her own life, the time passing as they attempt to resuscitate the patient, and the time it took for the consultant to arrive all take on significance.

Aspects of this experience are mirrored in the following LED from Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd.* Gabriel and Bathsheba are working through a lightning storm, endangering their lives to protect the hay ricks from the approaching rain. The farm and their livelihood depend on saving the hay.

> The next flare came. Bathsheba was on the ground now, shouldering another sheaf, and she bore its dazzle without flinching – thunder and all – and again ascended with the load. There was then a silence everywhere for four or five minutes, and the crunch of the spars, as Gabriel hastily drove them in, could again be distinctly heard. He thought the crisis of the storm had passed. But there came a burst of light.
> 'Hold on!' said Gabriel, taking the sheaf from her shoulder, and grasping her arm again.

> Heaven opened then, indeed. The flash was almost too novel for its inexpressibly dangerous nature to be at once realized, and they could only comprehend the magnificence of its beauty.
>
> (Hardy 1874, online)

Here, Gabriel and Bathsheba are working together (relationality) against time (temporality), handling the sheafs and the ladder and using the spars to secure the rick cloths over the hay (materiality). Despite their knowing assurance in the work, forces beyond their control render them helpless. Time and nature persist. Similarly, in Kate's account, she refers to the skill and experience of those around her (relationality), the shared knowledge that allows them to work quickly and effectively together and the critical importance of the work they are doing. It is here, in the relational aspects, in the impact their work can have on other people's lives, that meaning exists for her. She feels the loss of the young man's life over twenty years later. In the aftermath of this event, something shifted profoundly for her and prompted her to move from hospital work.

'No, I'm not changing it, that is what happened'

> But it was afterwards then the problem was that, ah, the anaesthetist arrived and 'where the F were you?' from the senior guy. 'We were such and such.' and we were, 'No you weren't, you weren't there.' 'We were.' and then this conflict arose that, ah and like, we were strong enough personalities that we knew that and I don't take any of that crap. I went off to write my notes and I sat down and wrote exactly what happened, uhm, three pages and signed it and left it there.
>
> So, I was called into the office and told 'Change that' and I said, 'No, I'm not changing it, that is what happened' and ah, I'd a chief consultant anaesthetist standing over me, I had the ward sister who was a total wimp and I said 'I just put down the facts of what happened during the day' and was hauled over the coals for about three hours. And then I left and that was it and that was just a really bad experience. So I went into nursing homes after that.
>
> (Kate 1, p.5-6)

Here Kate notes the hierarchy of the profession spatially, with a consultant standing over her. She feels it in her body – being hauled over the coals (corporeality). She refers to the lack of support and is harsh in her judgement of the ward sister as 'a total wimp' (relationality). She has a sense of herself that she refuses to compromise, she does not 'take any of that crap'. There is pressure to conform but she is unwilling to compromise her values. Park (2010) asserts that after reflecting on events, individuals determine the fit or discrepancy between the situational meaning of the event and their own personal global meaning. For this participant, the loss of the young man's life was a shock to her and her

colleagues, but it was this experience in the aftermath that conflicted with her own global meaning, which incorporates her sense of self and that self within the world.

When she is told to change her account, the meaning of her work is appropriated, or taken out for her. She considers that this event precipitated her move from hospital work. Van Manen suggests that 'anecdotal narrative allows the person to reflect in a concrete way on experience and thus appropriate that experience' (2014, p.250). Kate recognised and named this experience as one that stood out. She chose it as one anecdote from years of work to illustrate her own values and name the moment when she felt her values so undermined that she was no longer willing to continue with the work. The final section looks at Kate's experience of returning to work as an intern and her reflections on that experience.

'I just sat down and I was into work mode'

Kate describes returning to a workplace environment and is resuming 'work mode'. This suggests another way of being from 'at home mode'. It is the adoption of a persona that is familiar from previous employment, a person of focus and defined purpose, and the transition back into 'work mode' is immediate.

> So I came in the first day…I drove up that morning… I was delighted to be away from my family and 'this is *great*' and the sun was shining and I love going up the motorway … I love the mountains and trees and you come out of the work placement's door and you have the mountains … and I was walking over to a café for my cup of coffee every day.
>
> How bad does it get? I said, 'This is the life.' So I pulled up outside with my laptop and my stuff and … I had a nice dress on, you know, but you're allowed to be your own quirky self, it's not-, it's not business attire. I mean, I just sat down and I was into work mode and uhm, I'd done an audit on what was online already, you know and then I showed her samples of what other people were doing and I said, 'This is what I want us to do.'
>
> (Kate 1, p.10-11)

With the placement provider, whom she knows but has not worked with before, she says 'this is what I want us to do'. There is a sense of confidence and influence that comes with assuming work mode. She notes the autonomy of being allowed 'to be your own quirky self' - an individual in the world, autonomous but connected. The freedom not to have to conform to a particular dress code (materiality) is meaningful to her, validating a self that is individual. This suggests a sense of congruence between her own personal meaning, and the appraised meaning of the new workplace. There is an expression of delight in being away from the family, a sense of freedom outside her role in the family home again. She expresses joy in the journey to work and a self-awareness of this joy, saying to herself 'this is great'.

This joy is associated with looking outwards at the landscape and the open road (spatiality). She takes pleasure in the ritual of going for coffee and in the materiality of the task – searching websites and proposing a plan. A sense of control and well-being is described.

When she says 'this is the life', it's an expression which implies that, for a moment at least, what we desire and what we have are reconciled. The times where we have conscious awareness that 'this is the life' – that there is nowhere else to be, everything is in its place and as it should be – are oftentimes fleeting. In this LED the feeling is named. In *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Woolf describes this feeling in a passage about Mr Ramsay when all is as it should be, and this comfort gives Mr. Ramsay strength to devote himself to the work of his mind.

> He was safe, he was restored to his privacy. He stopped to light his pipe, looked once at his wife and son in the window, and as one raises one's eyes from a page in an express train and sees a farm, a tree, a cluster of cottages as an illustration, a confirmation of something on the printed page to which one returns, fortified and satisfied, so without his distinguishing either his son or his wife, the sight of them fortified him and satisfied him and consecrated his effort to arrive at a perfectly clear understanding of the problem which now engaged the energies of his splendid mind.
>
> (Woolf 1927, p.24)

Like Mr. Ramsay, Kate was filled with a sense of clarity and purpose. They see the world outside as a backdrop to the place of work, they are in their right place in the world.

Later Kate reflects on the marketing role she has undertaken on placement and returns to the consideration of meaning in her work.

> I can do all that, but it's a bit-, what annoys me about it, it's so false and fake and I hate all that marketing, happiness, falsie, fakey.
>
> (Kate 1, p.16)

This 'falsie fakey', indicates an absence of meaning. She considers what she wants from work:

> I can work for a big machine if I'm doing something purposeful or if I have-, ah, but it has to have purpose. You know, I don't need any glory or achievement. You know, I need a sense of worth about it and achievement and it needs to be purposeful and make a difference to somebody else, uhm and- and an income.
>
> (Kate 1, p.22)

Like other participants, Kate acknowledges the necessity for financial reward for her work, but this is only part of the function of work for her. The search for meaning at work is foremost for Kate and meaning for her is being carved out between her relationships with the task and with other people.

5.7 Conclusion

The example of Kate's narrative offers a lens into the themes identified in the model of *Meaning-Making in Work Transitions* that will be used to further analyse the data in the next chapter. In the first instance, her experience is framed within the time, the region, the opportunities available to her etc. This is explored in the next chapter under Context. Her willingness to change is evident, she has moved from nursing to IT, and this theme is explored under adaptable activity. The relational nature of work is present in her experience, both in the context of family and with colleagues, which reflects relationality. She has created and shared a career story, identifying key moments, motivations and values. The concept of career story will be explored under narratability. Finally, she refers explicitly to seeking purpose in her work, and this is at the centre of *Meaning-Making in Work Transitions.* Each of these themes will be analysed in turn in the following chapter.

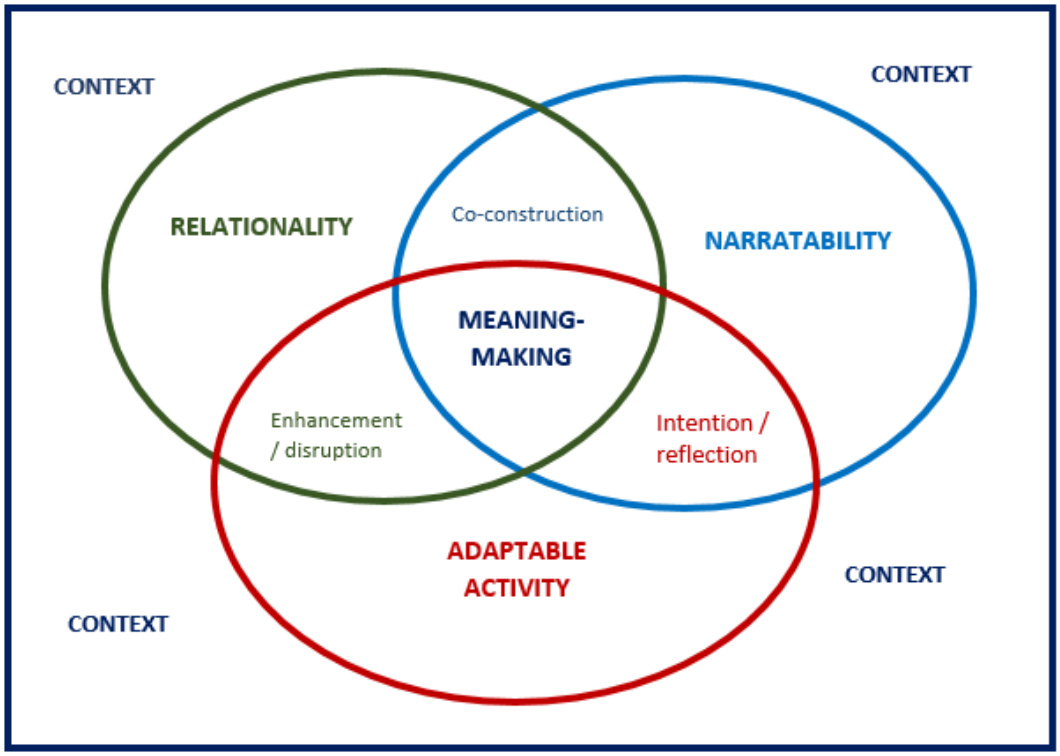
Van Manen acknowledges the complexity of researching the human experience; 'as one develops a focus on the phenomena of lived experience, it soon appears that these phenomena are highly elusive and problematic' (Van Manen 2014, p.242). Returning to the workplace following unemployment is, as Van Manen says, an elusive experience. Lived experience is multifaceted; the activity we engage in and with whom, how we talk about and make sense of it, and with whom, are not isolated elements. The participant and literary LEDs evoke this and facilitate a nearness to the experience that would otherwise be impossible to achieve. Through the use of narrative, the participant experience is memorable to us. This is because it resonates with elements of our own experience. We do not need to go through unemployment or work placement, to recognise the familiarity of the stories. It is in this way that the LEDs provide us with insight, through a synergy of what the participants experience with what we already know.

Chapter 6 – Discussion - Thematic Analysis

6.1 Introduction

The study in the previous chapter presents narratives from participants and literature around the experience of working. Examining the narratives in this way, by considering each of the existentials in turn, forces a fresh look at the experience. This enables a 'suspension or bracketing of the everyday natural attitude', advocated in phenomenology (Moran 2002, p.2). Events are experienced on every level, physically, spatially, in relation to ourselves, others, tools and time. The complexity of experience is evident in the LEDs in Chapter 5. Through 'oversight of a larger data set' (Smith et al. 2009, p.23) - which includes anecdote, descriptive passages, participant opinion and reflection - connections emerge. Looking at consistency of themes across the participant experience, together with seeking insight from relevant literature, allowed the identification of five key themes. This process has been outlined in Section 4.5.3. The five themes are outlined and discussed in this chapter using the proposed model *Meaning-Making in Work Transitions* (see Figure 8 below).

Figure 8: Meaning-Making in Work Transitions



The model places meaning-making at the centre of the experience of work transitions. The elements of the model around that centre draw on the writing of Savickas et al. (2009) and Blustein (2011). Savickas et al. (2009) assert that 'by engaging in activities in diverse roles, individuals identify those activities that resonate with their core self' (p.241). This notion of a 'core self' is used in Savickas et al.'s approach and in the current study in a social constructionist context. That is, it is not considered that a core self is one that exists as a trait or inherent personality independent of social context, it is rather through social interaction that we co-construct who we are. Drawing on Park (2010) in the model proposed, it is argued that the activity of meaning-making is akin to reducing the gap between the meaning that is emerging in new situations and the meaning that we understand to align with our core self.

The study adapts Savickas et al.'s theory of life-designing (2009) and combines it with Blustein's (2011) relational theory of working. Thus the model takes concepts from established and emergent career literature, and adapts them to look at the process of work transitions for the mature worker. Specifically, the circles of narratability and adaptable activity are informed by the work of the Life Design approach (Savickas et al. 2009, Nota and Rossier 2015). The overlapping sections of intention/reflection, enhancement/disruption and co-construction draw similarly from Savickas et al. (2009), and more broadly from the social constructionist paradigm (e.g. Young and Collin 2004). The goals of the life design approach are adaptability, narratability, activity and intentionality, and these are integrated into the model.

However, while the life design approach is intended as a counselling intervention, the model of *Meaning-Making in Work Transitions* is proposed as a framework for examining and understanding experience. The life design approach acknowledges context and multiple life roles within its model though this isn't in the foreground of its framework. However, as relationality emerges as a fundamental aspect of the experience of this group, Blustein's work (e.g Blustein et al. 2004, Blustein et al. 2008, Blustein 2011) has been integrated here and is represented by one of the three overlapping sections of the model. It emerges for those in this study that meaning-making is at the centre of the experience. While meaning and purpose is referred to, both by Blustein et al. (2004) and Savickas et al. (2009), it is not identified as a theme in those theoretical frameworks. *Meaning-Making in Work Transitions*

thus contributes to literature by offering an alternative model reflective of the experience of the mature intern.

This allows for more systematic analysis of the participant experience. First, participants experience their working lives in the context of the wider world – regional and national economics and their own backgrounds (context). Second, participants describe their activity, which they are all the time adapting, and the tasks they undertake (adaptable activity). Third, a sense of belonging and purpose happens through social relations (relationality) both in the context of market work and personal work (Richardson 2002). Fourth, in the telling of their work story, participants create a coherent work identity (narratability). Fifth and finally at the centre of the experience, where the elements overlap is meaning-making. Each of these themes, and the intersecting spaces in between, will be looked at in turn.

6.2 Context

Everything within the *Meaning-Making in Work Transitions* model takes place within context so this forms the outer frame of the model. The participant's experience is embedded in the broader context of the economic and political dynamics of recession as experienced in the region. They have made their way back to college, successfully completed their coursework, and secured placement. All participants operate within the structure of their own context, that is their upbringing, education, gender, family status, economic background and cultural values. Their experience sits within the broader context of employment and industry trends, for example the IT industry and its own working culture. The context includes society's expectations - whether perceived or actual – of men and women in their late 20s, 30s or 40s. Expectations exist, again whether these are perceived or actual, in the work domain, of mature experienced professionals and in the personal domain, there are normative expectations of parents of young families or of grown-up children of aging parents. All of this is part of our existence or Dasein (Heidegger 1927). It is not possible to separate who we are from the context within which we live.

Participants bring their own levels of power to the experience of placement, which encompasses financial capital, cultural knowledge and social capital. Included in cultural knowledge and capital is educational history, for example the experience of engaging with the HE system, and the ease with which participants can settle into and succeed on one year

academic programmes, or previous access to maths education. Cultural knowledge and experience enhances participant ability to succeed, for example, familiarity with social welfare and education entitlements are necessary in order to access a Springboard funded programme. Social capital includes the levels of networks and supports that participants have access to. Economic power can determine the ability to pursue further qualifications, current levels of household income determine choices around a year of non-earning. There is the dynamic of financial earning power or disempowerment experienced through redundancy and unemployment and undertaking a low paid or unpaid internship. Varying levels of capital in these domains can serve as empowering or disempowering elements for participants. Relevant aspects of participant contexts are examined here, including gender, ethnicity, unemployment and re-entering the workforce.

6.2.1 Gender

The ratio of men to women participating on Springboard ICT programmes is approximately two to one (HEA 2014). College and career choices are often decided earlier, at school level where subject choices can determine later available options. There is a gender imbalance in the uptake of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects for school leaving examinations. As recently as 2011 for example, male students were 19% more likely to take higher level maths at leaving certificate (Murray 2015). Maths ability is a key consideration when choosing an ICT college programme as 'the level of maths proficiency is a main predictor of non-progression' (EGFSN 2012, p.11). Elinor expresses exasperation at what she perceives as gendered career paths; 'I mean my school didn't have physics even, it wasn't even an option… the schools are already streaming the girls so that they're not going to go into computing' (3, p.72). Societal values are embedded in the system, there are unspoken assumptions around what are appropriate career choices for girls. This can make it more difficult for girls to consider subjects in the first instance, and access the necessary education in the second, in order to lay the foundations for potential careers in IT.

The gender imbalance is represented later, in the workforce, where the men outnumber women 7 to 3 in the IT sector (Rosner 2015). Female participants demonstrate an awareness of this:

> I went for a lunch when somebody left about a month ago and there was 30 of us for lunch and I was the only woman at the lunch. I suppose in some sense I'm used to it, I've five brothers so, I think that's probably a help.
>
> (Eithne 5, p.97)

Female participants do not see the gender imbalance as an inhibitor:

> You know, dealing with male consultants who were very strong personalities was hard, but that's only come to me very, very late, but it doesn't matter if it's late, you know, it doesn't bother me.
>
> (Kate 1, p. 30-31)

> It's not a barrier for me, I prefer working with men generally. I suppose a lot of the IT companies though, they would have been a bit gender biased in that the ones I worked in, all the men rose up. There was very few women in management.
>
> (Elinor 3, p.71)

Elinor recognises here that gender politics exist and need to be negotiated in the workplace. Three of the four participants who describe re-entering the workforce after time in childcare roles in the home are women. The experience of female participants differs at times and in life roles then, to that of the male participants. The focus of this research is not to look specifically to gendered experience, but rather to acknowledge the role of gender as an element of the experience under study. In order to understand the experience it is essential to maintain context to the foreground.

6.2.2 Ethnicity

Amos is Nigerian, and the only non-Irish born participant in the study. Having completed his programme of study, he was unable to find paid employment in Waterford but has been successful in securing work in the UK. While he would prefer for his family to join him in London, his wife has now found work in Waterford and his children are settled in school. He talks about the reason he felt it necessary to seek work in the UK:

> I am not very quick to play the victim because we are black or because we are immigrants and so on, but a lot of my country people do that and I tell them there's discrimination everywhere, even in Nigeria, but I think yes, the UK is much more multi-cultural, so it's easier, they don't see it as something untoward. Here, I think it's still not like that. They still see that immigrants haven't achieved much. I think generally in Waterford, people are very conservative and the job market is tight, so all those things come into play I believe in people's minds, even if it's not obvious.
>
> (Amos 11, p.184)

Amos does not feel that he has access to the same opportunity as other graduates. The work market is a site of 'freedom and constraint' (McKinlay 2010, p.234) and he is disempowered in the workplace by his non-Irishness. Together with challenges that Amos shares with other participants, he has the challenge that his immigrant status and its perception poses. This is experienced as a disempowerment.

6.2.3 Unemployment / Disempowerment

An experience of disempowerment that all participants share is unemployment. Feelings of loss of purpose, and awareness of public perception of this are described:

> Yeah, people start seeing you at the school gate, 'oh you're not working today?', people are uhm, inquisitive, 'oh, what's wrong with you or what?', you know, you think it's your own fault when it's not like, you have no control over the situation. It's like kind of rejected effectively from society.
>
> (Claire 4, p.83)

There is a strong sense here that participants feel the pressure of normative expectations – that they feel the need to be in paid employment in order to feel validated:

> I remember meeting someone else who was out of work saying that they feel legitimate at the weekend and there is an element of that, that you're almost hiding during the week because you know you should be at work, you shouldn't be off for a walk or something like that.
>
> (Eithne 5, p.100)

Unemployment is not only experienced as a personal challenge, it is experienced as a loss of status in relation to others. This includes unnamed others, peers at the school gate, and wider communities with weekday work and weekend leisure habits. Kate describes below the challenge of re-entering the workforce and the need for relevant IT experience:

> It's very hard to find your way. I mean, I've applied for gazillions of jobs. Cannot get through filters, no [relevant] experience, forget it. It's just not happening.
>
> (Kate 1, p.33-34)

Filters are blocking access and Kate is left outside, on the periphery so that unemployment is felt as a lack of control over current and future working life.

6.2.4 Return to Workforce / Empowerment

In the process of regaining access to the world of work, participants identify that the availability of a funded reskilling programme was invaluable to them. In this way Springboard mitigates against financial disempowerment. It provides both economic support for retraining, and access support to re-employment through the placement. Firstly, it allows an opportunity to access higher education that would not be available otherwise, due to the financial cost:

> It was Springboard really because I wouldn't have had the money to spend another three or four thousand on that, I wouldn't have made that investment at the time, or more.
>
> (Eithne 5, p.95)
>
> I would not have gone back if I had to pay, even though I've paid this year when I went back. No problem, but I wouldn't have gone back had it have been full-blown five, six thousands, whatever it was to go back.
>
> (Fred 9, p.145)

Without the provision of Springboard places, participants would not have the economic capital to the pursue a career change.

Secondly, when it came to preparing to go on placement, a participant describes the feeling of confidence that the support of a HE provider brings.

> [A previous Springboard programme I completed] didn't have the placement and it didn't have the careers. This does, which is huge and the placement is a huge advantage because definitely, if you've been out of a job, you feel very shaky, you feel very unsure.
>
> (Beth 7, p.126)

Participants note that through their internship network, the HE provider has privileged access to potential roles. This again signifies empowerment – the participants now have access to the HE's network.

> Another reason to do the course was the placement was attached to it and I was so struggling to get work in Waterford because jobs aren't advertised and I suppose [my placement provider] didn't advertise … So to get a job is almost impossible if- if you don't know the right channels and that opened up a few channels that I wouldn't have known about.
>
> (Elinor 3, p.72)

Participants acknowledge the role of the placement co-ordinator in securing the placement, and providing the link to the employer.

> She physically walked out to each place and got all these jobs for us and uhm… You know, they really knocked on the doors. They went door-to-door around town here, fair play to them.
>
> (Claire 4, p.87)

The supported nature of this re-entry to the workforce is described as pivotal. Participants had previously felt isolated in their struggle to find work, but now have access to a guaranteed work placement opportunity.

The work placement is repeatedly referred to by participants as being of utmost importance, in allowing them the opportunity to re-engage with the workforce.

> Can I just comment on that? [why I went on the Business Systems Analysis course] The reason I went on that was because it was the only one in WIT on the Springboard offering a work placement, and I knew that my real stumbling block was getting in the door somewhere because my CV had gone a little stale and I knew if I could get in I could impress people enough.
>
> (Eithne 5, p.94)

> It's like how am I going to get experience, they won't give me a job and it's the biggest thing. With the work placement, it's invaluable, just to be able to say you worked there.
>
> (Fred 9, p.156)

What is emerging here is that on the one hand the workforce is encouraged to be adaptable, for example in the *National Skills Strategy 2025* (Department of Education and Skills 2016). Participants show a willingness to adapt, learn new skills and move to alternative disciplines. They then find the lack of relevant experience in that discipline precludes them from being considered for work roles. In times of economic recession, the jobs market is keenly competitive and participants describe being excluded from recruitment processes.

While acknowledging that WIT opened the door to the internship and facilitated the placement experience, once participants begin work, they describe taking full responsibility for their own situation. In the context of time spent on placement, the majority make no mention of the HE provider and just one participant, Marianne, accesses the support of the placement co-ordinator to resolve an issue. The sense of personal responsibility felt by participants is articulated in the following way by Seán, who completed his placement and was kept on by the placement organisation in a paid capacity:

> There's not a lot of control I would say from the course and if you're a course leader on the actual work placement. When students go into the work placement, the student has to adapt and put in a bit of effort, but also the company-, you can't control what the company do. So I suppose there's not a lot of control you can have over that. From my experience, all I could say to a student who was going to do it was give it your all and be proactive there and be enthusiastic because if you sit there and twiddle your thumbs the company are going to forget about you after your 12 weeks and you'll get nothing out of it.
>
> (Seán 14, p.215)

Participants feel that placement is 'on them', they perceive it both as their opportunity and their responsibility. As mature learners, they take ownership of their learning, both in coursework and on placement. Beth is preparing to go on placement, she has been working part-time while raising her children and is now looking for full-time work.

> This is me, this is my life now, carving out my own career and going with it, yes … I have to just go in and put my time in here and basically, seize the day, carpe diem.
>
> (Beth 7, p.125)

Here it is evident that participants value the opportunity to re-enter the workforce, they invest what they can and seek to gain as much as possible from that opportunity.

Relatively speaking the cohort under study have high social, educational and human capital. They live in a democratic society, have middle class backgrounds, qualifications, all but one participant are Irish born and have knowledge of the HE system having previously been through it, and have experience of the working world, having years of practical knowledge and skills. One of the conditions of Springboard is that participants have a previous history

of employment so they have experience of economic capital in the form of salaried income. Their experience then sits within this context, which is represented in the model as the holding space within which they are enabled or obstructed in making work transitions. Participants describe how disempowerment in unemployment moves to empowerment through Springboard programme provision.

6.3 Adaptable Activity

Savickas (2013) identifies dimensions of adaptability, and these are concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. The attitudes, competencies and behaviours associated with these dimensions of adaptability are outlined in the table below.

Table 11: Career Adaptability Dimensions

Adaptability Dimension	Attitudes and Beliefs	Competence	Coping Behaviours	Career Problem
Concern	Planful	Planning	Aware Involved Preparing	Indifference
Control	Decisive	Decision making	Assertive Disciplined Wilful	Indecision
Curiosity	Inquisitive	Exploring	Experimenting Risk Taking Inquiring	Unrealism
Confidence	Efficacious	Problem solving	Persistent Striving Industrious	Inhibition

Savickas (2013, p.158)

Participants speak to each of the adaptability dimensions identified by Savickas (2013). Savickas asserts that 'Career concern means essentially a future orientation' (2013, p.159) and participants are very planful. Completing a reskilling programme and going on placement is part of a broader plan for their working lives. Amos describes how he was initially turned down for a HE programme and sought other ways of achieving his goal. He demonstrates concern and curiosity. He exercises control and confidence, being decisive and persistent in pursuing his qualifications.

> I felt 'okay, if they are not going to allow me through go to that route, let me try something else. Then I will challenge myself and see how I can perform in this system'. I've been out of school for a long time so, all that was going through my mind so, let me do a higher cert. So I did that and I got a distinction so I said I know I can do it. So now I have a qualification from here, let me see how they'll turn me down now.
>
> (Amos 11, p.173)

Other participants similarly demonstrate a curiosity to explore, take risks and 'have a go'.

> [I had worked in] Finance. So it was a complete different change. Manufacturing; I didn't know anything. They wanted me to look at the layout of the manufacturing area to see where there was a waste and what was time consuming and where they could move machines. I was like, 'Okay?!?' [laughs] *Interviewer:* Did you feel in a position to do that? *Participant:* No!
>
> (Anna 6, p.106)

Through taking on a change in their work roles, participants are demonstrating all the competencies identified by Savickas, planning, decision making, exploring and problem-solving. Tom spoke about working in a new environment and catching up as tiring, 'but it's also wonderful. That's the other side of it, I love learning, I love the challenge' (8, p.136). He is enquiring and industrious. The participants are proactively seeking learning experiences.

Participants also demonstrate a career confidence, in that they can connect previous experiences with what they are currently pursuing. The phenomenologist Schutz writes about how we act and plan and suggests that a person 'having rehearsed all the possibilities of action open to him in the future perfect tense, he will put in action that solution which seems to have the greatest chance of success' (1970, p.135). Participants, in constructing their career story, find examples from the past that illustrate that the task at hand will be possible to complete. High levels of self-efficacy, or confidence (Savickas 2013) in taking on a new task are demonstrated. At times participants identify themselves as a problem-solver, or talk about an early interest in websites, or an identified aptitude for maths.

> Well generally when I take it on I'll do it… I liked maths in school, I was always pretty okay with that, I didn't have any experience in technology we'll say, but I felt confident that I would, that I'd be able to do it, I'd figure it out.
>
> (Eithne 5, p.95)

> I was always good at maths coming up and that was kind of a bond between me and my dad. I had a fabulous maths teacher from first to fifth year… he didn't see male or female, he just saw the brain and he loved maths.
>
> (Kate 1, p. 7-8)

That participants can tell a meaningful and coherent working life into being is an integral part of Savickas' career construction theory and relates to ideas of narratability which will be explored further in Section 6.5.

Participants are describing adapting to new work place environments, new colleagues and new tasks. The cohort under study demonstrate high psychological mobility (Sullivan and Arthur 2006), they are actively learning new skills and adopting new roles, they are re-imagining their working selves. They demonstrate physical mobility in moving into alternative industries though for the most part they lack physical mobility in their

unwillingness to move out of the region. Sullivan and Arthur identify that 'there are two types of mobility—the physical, which is the transition across boundaries and the psychological, which is the perception of the capacity to make transitions' (2006, p.21). While participants have been mobile in the past – the majority of participants have spent time working outside the region - they are committed to the South-East because of the emphasis they place on the relational aspects of their lives, the importance of their family and social networks.

They recognise that in Waterford and the South-East region they are not able to access employment appropriate to their experience and skills level.

> If I was in Dublin I would have been creaming money, my wife and house were here, so that was the anchor.
>
> (Tom 8, p.135)

They demonstrate a commitment to family and staying in the region – as Tom describes, family acts as an anchor. Joe too remarks that having met his wife in Waterford he was not going to move back to Dublin for work:

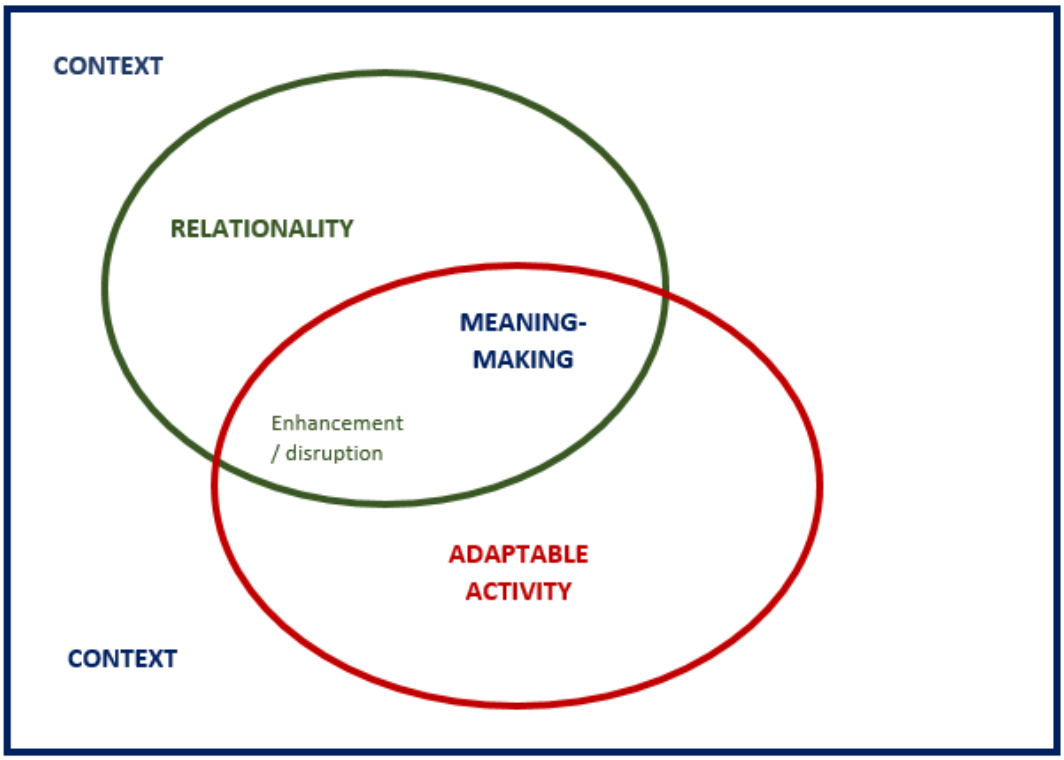
> having spent the vast majority of my childhood saying, 'there's absolutely no effing way I'm ever going to stay in Waterford,' best laid plans.
>
> (Joe 12, p.189)

Because of their family and friend networks, participants are very committed to the region. They are invested in making opportunities work. Claire describes that she will explore every option in order to be able to remain living in Waterford with her children.

> I love them to bits and that. If I can a job great, if I can't, I will have to have my own little business or something. I'll think of something, but obviously I want to be there with them, that's why I'm not going up and down to Dublin or Cork you know.
>
> (4, p.90)

The choice of moving either to Dublin, or abroad where employment prospects would be more favourable is taken by one participant, Amos, as he considers that he does not have a choice. Participants here describe making significant changes to their lives for family reasons, including moving back to a region where their chances of employment in their domain of expertise was much diminished. Participants are limited in their ability to adapt geographically. This offers one example of how adaptable activity and relationality overlap (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Overlap of Adaptable Activity and Relationality



This reflects Blustein's relational theory where 'conceptualizing working as a relational act underscores that each decision, experience, and interaction with the working world is understood, influenced, and shaped by relationships' (2011, p.1). This is captured by the intersection in the model of relationality and adaptable activity which are mutually dependent in an 'enhancement / disruption' dynamic. Briscoe and Hall (2006) define a protean career as one in which the person is 'values driven' and 'self-directed' in personal career management. In the model offered, being self-directed is represented in adaptable activity, and being values-driven aligns with participants' desire to engage in work that is meaningful to them. The protean career concept however, suggests an individualistic approach that is not present in the participant experience or in the model.

6.4 Relationality

Blustein (2011) asserts that 'for the most part, existing theoretical perspectives have articulated a vision of individuals who are fairly autonomous and who intentionally seek to manifest their goals, interests, values and abilities in the world of work' (p.1). While

participants have relatively privileged profiles, they do not act independently. Blustein offers a number of propositions which resonate with this study, the first being that 'work and relationships share considerable psychological space in our internal worlds and in our lived experience, with each context of life impacting on and shaping the other' (2011, p.9). Blustein emphasises relationships both at work and in our personal lives, including relationships that have a developmental effect during our early lives.

The life-design approach (Savickas et al. 2009, Nota and Rossier 2015) emphasises the contextualised nature of work. 'Career problems are only a piece of much broader concerns about how to live a life in a postmodern world shaped by a global economy and supported by information technology' (Savickas et al. 2009, p.241). Through his relational theory of working, Blustein (2011) looks to 'eliminate the artificial splits that exist in the relationship and work interface' (p.2). Our relationships are a holding space for our cultural norms e.g. a key influencer being our family backgrounds and the development of our expectations, habits and ways of being. Schultheiss (2006) offers four themes in the context of work and family. The first relates to belonging and inclusion, and will be examined under meaning-making. The remaining three are examined under personal relationships below: multiple life roles, including the unpaid work that people undertake; work and family navigation, often referred to as a work/life balance; and, finally, a supportive family system.

6.4.1 Personal Relationships

Many participants describe the interdependent nature of their personal life and their working lives as they move between multiple life roles. Beth frames this in the extract below as 'life gets in the way' of career. There is the sense that when life happens and impacts on work plans, it is a disruption of an anticipated linear progression in the workplace. She is establishing a working life in America and has enrolled in college there when her mother, at home in Ireland, becomes ill and dies. At the same time, she and her husband are beginning a family. She articulated a need to come home to Ireland though she and her husband were settling into a prosperous life in enjoyable well paid jobs abroad.

> If you'd asked me at the time because we were actually looking for houses in the States, we were living in the States and I was actually going to go to university. I had it mapped out for myself so, it's amazing how life gets in the way.
>
> (7, p.114)

Claire explains that it was her father's illness that brings her home from London though this is through obligation rather than choice.

> I loved it and I would have stayed in London maybe forever, but, uhm, then my father got ill and there was a tragedy as well and they said, 'No, you're going to have to come home.' So I came home and remember thinking, 'Oh God, I just got a promotion and coming back here.'
>
> (4, p.84)

Both of these excerpts outline a life event that is regarded as disruptive. Joe describes willingly taking on the responsibility of nursing his father, though again phrases it as a disruption to an anticipated linear career pathway.

> Then I took a complete left turn. I moved back down to Waterford, purely for personal reasons. My father had a stroke and my mother was running her own business. So she really couldn't take time off.
>
> (12, p.188)

As Blustein (2011) asserts, the idea of an autonomous individual mapping out and enacting their career, independent of their relationships, is unhelpful. For participants, their working lives and their relational lives share the same space. Blustein et al. note that in vocational psychology, 'the focus on an autonomous, vertical progression of paid work in the public sphere has predominated' (2004, p.428). When experience disproves this idea, it is unsettling. Participants demonstrate that they have an underlying assumption that career ought to be a linear pathway, and that deviations from this are deviations from a desirable norm. This reflects societal conceptions, which is represented in the model by Context, and poses a challenge to the co-construction of a career story that integrates relationality. What is emerging here is that the language and imagery we use to describe career, and articulate intentions and reflections, can be removed from the reality of people's experience.

Beth notes her own values in her decision to move back to Ireland, her choice is embedded in her cultural view of family and the family / work dynamic in the American context.

> I think there was a combination of both me being a mother and losing my mother. A sense of place. So where then do you want to bring your kids up became the big question? You're time poor. Even though I loved America and the whole experience and everything that it has to offer, from a family point of view it's not great in the sense that you don't get the time off.
>
> (7, p.115)

Blustein brings in the idea of culture which he says 'represents an internalization of collective and individual representations of people, their values, and their characteristic ways of responding to life events' (2011, p.9). In the meaning-making model, culture is part of the context, that is the space within which the experience happens. Participants navigate their life through the lens of their cultural values, at times prioritising family or unpaid work over paid work. They describe the challenges of this work and family navigation (Richardson 2002). Four of the women interviewed are mothers, and three of them describe taking time

away from fulltime paid work, to work in the home. Three of the men interviewed are fathers, and one, Amos describes staying at home to mind his children while his wife studied:

> I loved being with the kids. I never knew I would. Again, our culture back home is different from here. My dad used to say-, he doesn't brag about it, but he used to say when we were born, those tiny little things, I don't touch them until they are three months old because a man doesn't do that, but coming here-. I was there all through the pregnancy, we didn't have an extended family to help obviously. I was in the hospital. Even when the baby was born, handed over to me.
>
> (Amos 11, p.172)

Brian describes how a redundancy meant he had more time for his family, which he values.

> To be honest, taking the redundancy, which was a big change for me financially and all that kind of stuff, I'd never give it back because even having last summer off and being able to spend time with the kids, which I never had and I think throughout this whole process, I've discovered the whole work-life balance scenario that I didn't have for years.
>
> (Brian 13, p.207)

Participants clearly value spending time in the home engaging in personal work. This is considered separate to professional work, and when looking to reintegrate into the paid work force, participants find this challenging. Richardson (2002) posits that 'the personal domains and dimensions of life are marginalized in most career practice' (p.412). The mothers re-entering the workforce articulate the challenge it presents to them.

> We were at a barbecue and there was a lecturer there and he said, 'Oh yes, we get all these women in their 40s and 50s to do their Masters and then they go back to the kitchen', and I'm going 'that's not fair', but it's very hard to find your way.
>
> (Kate, p.33-34)
>
> So you're going back out there and you're like a babe out in the woods trying to figure it out and trying to find your groove and it can be quite daunting.
>
> (Beth 7, p.126)

Schultheiss (2006) asserts that 'parenting and caregiving are not just invisible but can be barriers to paid employment and success in competitively based work practices' (p.336). The experience of the parents in this study reflect Schultheiss's assertion. They find it very challenging to navigate recruitment processes. The time spent parenting and caregiving is perceived by participants and in their view by recruiters, as a gap on their cv. There is a keen sense amongst participants that work in the home holds no value in the professional domain.

Participants describe supportive family systems, for many this has made it possible to study. Schultheiss (2006) asserts that 'those individuals who have the benefits of consistent, accessible, and reliable others are better equipped to negotiate challenges and manage anxiety that sometimes accompanies facing the overlapping demands of life's domains'

(p.339). Participants describe the economic support they received from their family members.

> She had my back, it's tough financially, we just kept telling ourselves, 'think of it long-term', sometimes I don't bloody see it.
>
> (Fred 9, p.156)

Claire describes the role of grandparents in providing childcare support to allow her complete college work.

> Grandparents had to step in to help out. You know, people had to step in just to kind of make sure I was there at lessons and classes and exam time and all that. So you know you're relying on other people as well, it wasn't a solo trip you were doing.
>
> (4, p.91)

Participants describe that their decision to come back to college was not an autonomous one, but made taking consideration of their partners.

> As it was it was a tough enough ask of [my wife] anyway, but if I had to as well lump on a large sum of debt on top of that, it would have been a very difficult decision.
>
> (Joe 12, p.196)
>
> My wife was happy for me to do it as well. She could see that I needed to do something different.
>
> (Brian 13, p.207)

Blustein (2011) in his relational theory of working 'seeks to map the fluid space shared between relationships and working' (p.5). The way in which people integrate personal relationships and personal work when navigating their work life comes to the fore in participant experience and reflects Blustein's theory. Relationships are key, both personal relationships as illustrated above, and workplace relationships as explored in the following section.

6.4.2 Workplace Relationships

The meaning of work being embedded in relationships came to the fore in the LEDs in chapter 5. Schultheiss (2006) posits that 'work is embedded within social structures' (p.335). Within her definition of 'market work' Richardson includes the work that people do in educational institutions to prepare for work (2012, p.191). This phase of re-entering the workplace, in a structured learning environment with peers experiencing the same challenges at a similar life stage, helped participants to re-imagine themselves. Participants describe a sense of belonging to a group which is positive. This sharing of experience offers both embeddedness and mutuality (Josselson 1992, cited in Blustein et al. 2004). Coming back to college and going on work placement offers the opportunity to reconnect, firstly to the peer group in college.

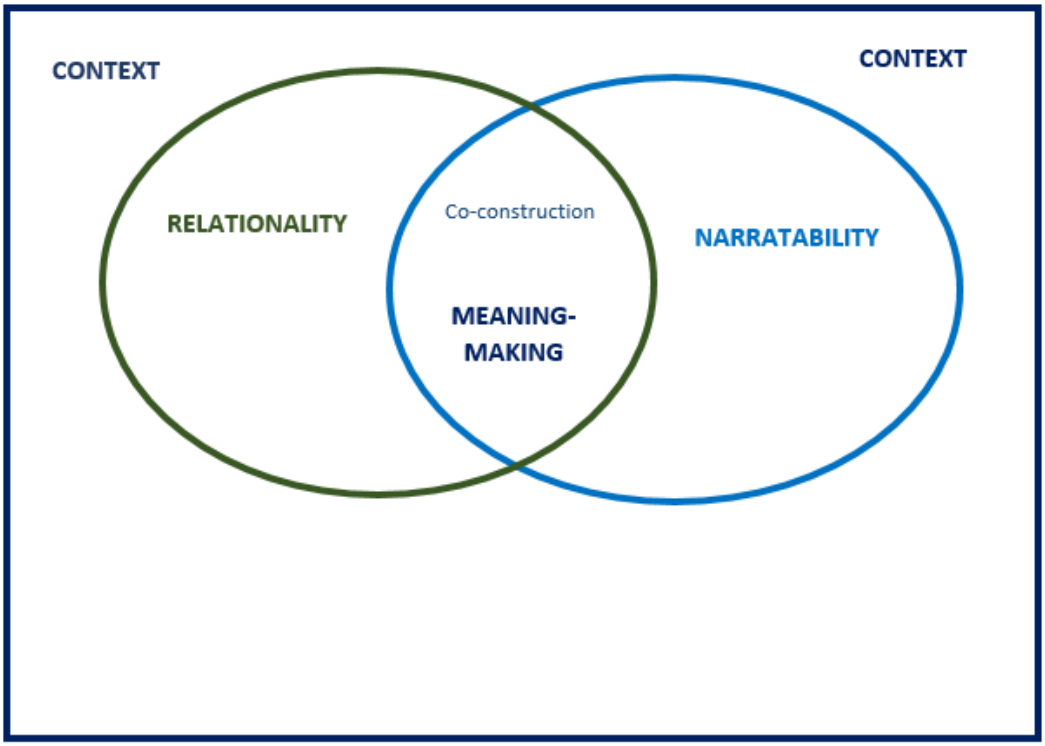
> It was just such a relief, such a joy to meet people who were in exactly the same position and who understood exactly what you're talking about and I think that

> socially that's a huge blow, which obviously has a knock-on emotionally as well. So it was really good just to be in the same room as people who were in a similar situation.
>
> (Eithne 5, p.101)
>
> So there was a lot of kindred spirit there, which I think helped because we all understood where each of us were and everyone was prepared to help each other as well.
>
> (Brian 13, p.201)

The What Work's project looks at student engagement and retention at an undergraduate level in the UK across 22 HEIs. A key finding of that project is that a sense of belonging is central to student participation and retention (Thomas and Hill 2013). The experience of this cohort suggests that, as mature students, they too value a sense of belonging to their peer group in HE.

Once on placement, it is through shared tasks and relational elements that participants describe feeling positive and purposeful. It is here through relationships in the work place that participants can both find, or note the absence of, meaning. Participants talked about colleagues, contributing to the work of their team, having their work recognised by their peers and seniors, and how this contributed to feelings of well-being. Participants describe their relationship with the placement provider. Meaning does not automatically evolve from the placement experience, it is created within the framework of the organisational structure. The meaning of the placement experience is negotiated and co-constructed where relationality and narratability overlap (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Overlap of Relationality and Narratability



The role and tasks are named at the outset and renamed as the placement progresses. Expectations play a pivotal role in determining whether relationships at work provide support or disrupt the participant activity. Placement providers offer varying degrees of clarity in role descriptions, and facilitate differing levels of input from the participants to negotiate this. Some participants describe knowing exactly what the task involved. For those who are unsure initially what tasks they would be assigned, but are allowed space to negotiate this, it offers flexibility to some and an opportunity to choose an area of interest to them.

> It was an internship based on the course that I had been doing, but I think it was quite a broad and open-ended in terms of what I would be assisting with and then it was really a case of what areas I was interested in, how willing I was to roll up my sleeves as well and to meet some people in here.
>
> (Eithne 5, p.95)

In some instances, participants felt that the placement experience was loosely structured. Seán describes his experience:

> I hadn't a clue what they were bringing me in to do, they didn't really either, so I started working on that [project] and I suppose for two months I arsed around. It was 'bring in a student and we'll get them to work on this', but there was no method

> of how do we get him to work on this… so, I spent most of the summer actually asking people, 'What can I do here?' or 'Can I do more?'
>
> (14, p.210)

Negotiating the work placement role overlaps with narratability and relationality, in that participants are naming, developing and renaming the role together with co-workers. This negotiation overlaps too between adaptable activity and relationality, where work is either enhanced or disrupted by workplace relationships. A number of participants did not feel equipped to fulfil the expectations of the placement provider. Two participants experienced working in unpaid placements for non-profit making organisations, and were tasked with redesigning websites.

> My impression of it is that she wanted somebody in there who would do a website for her, like a graphic designer would do it- … I'm not a developer. So I went off and tried to learn-, I was trying my best.
>
> (Marianne 2, p.43)
>
> I suppose I was like the person on the white horse coming over the hill to them in a way, but I did explain you know.
>
> (Claire 4, p.82)

There wasn't a mentor available to them, and Marianne and Claire both considered the placement providers' expectations unrealistic. This indicates a misconception on the part of the placement provider, which compromised the potential for a meaningful engagement on placement.

The variety of experience here points towards the importance of negotiating and navigating placement provider and intern expectations. This again occupies the disruption / enhancement space between relationality and adaptable behaviour – participants are both enabled and prevented in developing their internship role in the relationships with colleagues and line managers. Co-construction occupies the overlap between narratability and relationality – what the internship is and could be is negotiated between the participant and his/her colleagues within the work place relationships. The tripartite agreement is set out at the beginning of the placement and agreed by the HEI, the participant and the placement provider. It is one way in which the place of the intern is articulated and agreed. This continues to be co-constructed throughout the placement process.

Participants talk about their perception of the relational elements of the work. For some they had explicit concerns about this and consciously worked to achieve good relations with colleagues and establish trust.

> I suppose the biggest fear was what other people thought of me. The most important thing I felt is the dynamic of the office and it was a huge thing. When I

> said the dynamic in the office, I mean interests and how you talk to people, like casual talk to people, not technical.
>
> (Fred 9, p.149)

> I would talk to people every day, work related or if I wanted clarity on something, I would speak to them. I would walk. I very rarely would use the internal phone, I like to get up and go and talk to people.
>
> (Seán 14, p.211)

Participants spoke about their status as interns, and whether this impacted on their relations in the working group. For many they did not consider this a factor.

> I am very, very happy here and I knew very much from the outset from the atmosphere and the culture here, it's a very nice place to work. I honestly didn't ever really feel like I was an intern. Sometimes I think these things are in your head and it's your approach maybe that you do feel.
>
> (Eithne 5, p.103)

Others felt their status as interns, in terms of limited access to the established social practice of the group – for example David describes the lunch time habits - or limited access to knowledge or participation in office activity.

> I suppose at lunchtime they did their own thing so I had to find something to do. So I felt they had their own routine. At first I sat with them for lunch, but that was the end of it after that.
>
> (David 10, p. 164)

In terms of relationships with their line manager, participants for the most part described positive interactions. Their line managers acted as their mentors and guides, and were available to them when needed.

> She's just so relaxed you could ask her anything and she was very descriptive and very positive, very positive [laughs]. You could ask her anything, she's really nice, great guidance.
>
> (Anna 6, p.111)

Others describe having more limited access to their placement provider.

> It's not that he's unapproachable or doesn't want to, I just think he doesn't have the time.
>
> (Brian 13, p.205)

Just one participant describes having negative interactions with her placement provider.

> I'd have to go up every week, once a week and she'd sit down and I just found the whole thing very uncomfortable to be honest with you. We'd sit at a screen and she'd look at the screen and she'd ask me what I was doing.
>
> (Marianne 2, p.41)

Blustein et al. (2004) assert that 'through work, we sense ourselves included in and part of a social meaning-making activity' (p.429). Participants describe how they achieve a sense of purpose and progress through their work in a social context, together with colleagues. Elinor talks about the colleagues in the office.

> I work with them all the time, I will ask them questions during the day, I'll stop and start. Yeah, we chat, we talk and we work together. We'll go to meetings together and so on. We help each other to move forward.
>
> (3, p.67)

Relationships both outside work and at work are a key element of this experience. Bringing this element to the foreground is consistent with a social constructionist approach, where 'the focus is on the process and dynamics of social interaction' (Blustein et al. 2004, p.427) and not on an individualised experience. Participants' lives are embedded in their relationships. It is evident throughout Section 6.4, that relationships both outside the workplace and within the work environment are of primary importance to participants and impact on the ability to adapt and create meaning in work. Decisions around work are taken in the context of family. The development of adaptable activity can be enabled or obstructed by colleagues and managers. The creation of a work story, or identity beyond that of intern, is contingent on relationships within the work placement. This element of narratability is examined below.

6.5 Narratability

Savickas et al. (2009) posit that 'together adaptability and narratability provide individuals with the flexibility and fidelity of selves that enables them to engage in meaningful activities and flourish in knowledge societies' (p.245). Telling a story about a career enables a person to maintain continuity of self over a period of time. As work contexts change, participants demonstrate the ability to identify a continuity of task, interest or values. LaPointe argues that 'narrative represents the primary genre of discourse for identity construction in the context of career' (2010, p.2). She posits that a person does not have a stable, developed sense of career identity that they retell consistently, but that their career identity is a co-construction in the context of the telling. Participants are recounting and recreating their career story before going on placement; on cvs, online profiles and in interviews. While on placement they are negotiating their role. In the research interview participants are reconstructing and retelling their career story. Each time the participant is creating the narrative, not just for the listener, but for themselves. Narratability overlaps again here with relationality in 'co-construction' (see Figure 10 in 6.4.2). It is always in a social context that we tell stories, that we tell our career narrative.

From the descriptive accounts gathered, two observations emerge, firstly the participants' inclination to view and frame their accounts within a positive narrative, and secondly it

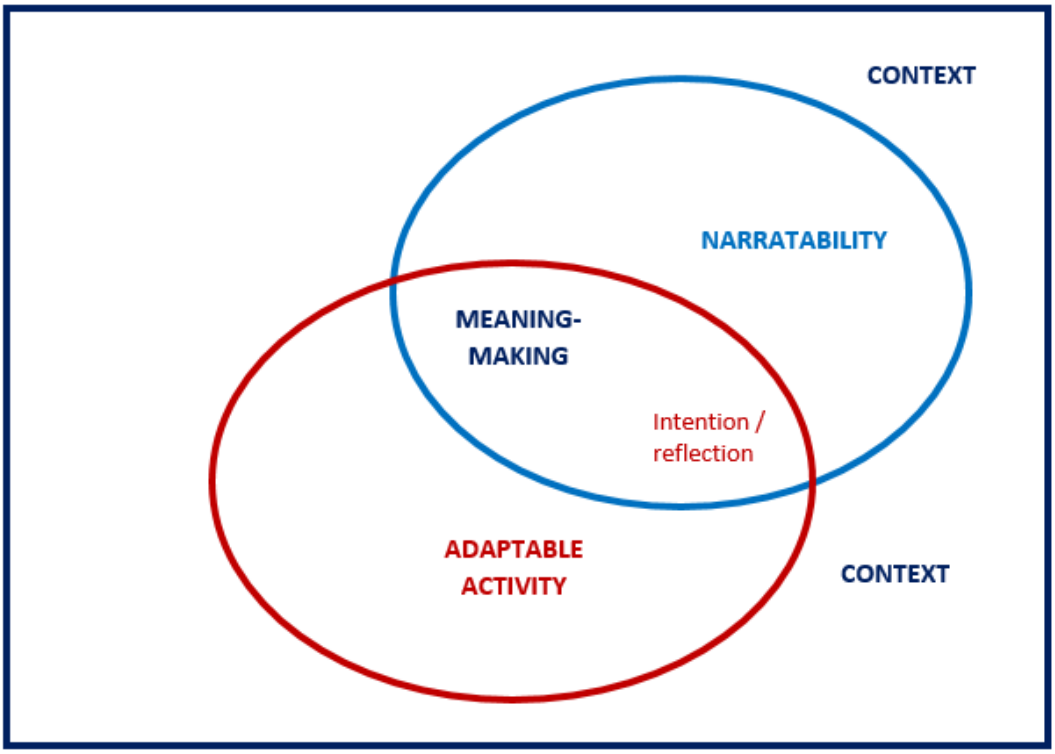
becomes apparent that there are elements of career identity that participants hold dear, and are reluctant to change. Participants tell, for the most part, positive stories, of being somewhere on the journey to a better place, a better job, more rewarding work. Participants interviewed are those who have made it back to college, have successfully completed their programme of study and secured work placement. As illustrated in section 6.3, participants are adaptable and demonstrate high levels of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy 'refers to personal beliefs about one's ability to perform particular behaviors or courses of action' (Lent and Brown 2013, p.561). Part of this belief is in the telling of the story into being, so for example the participants talk about always having an interest in IT.

> In my mind I wanted to do IT. IT was something I wanted to do. I always had an interest in websites, how they are made actually.
>
> (David 10, p.160)
>
> So I've always been interested in technology. So it's easy for me to pick stuff up… On the one hand, psychology and the other hand the technology were two things that always interested me.
>
> (Joe 12, p.188)

There is no doubt that this cohort of participants demonstrate what Savickas has identified as the attitudes and beliefs of career adaptors – they exercise concern, control, curiosity and confidence (Savickas 2013, p.158). They are disposed to considering events in a positive light, and they retell events with a focus on the positive, if this is only to outline the learning gained from a negative event.

When we think about and explain our activity, both to ourselves and to others, we give meaning to what happened in the past by reflecting on it in the context of the present, hence reflection. We give meaning too to our intentions and aspirations for the future, hence intention. Schutz (1970) uses the terms 'in-order-to' and 'because' motives to examine how we attribute reasons and motivations to our actions. An in-order-to motive describes 'the intention to bring about a projected state of affairs, to attain a pre-conceived goal' (Schutz 1970, p.127), whereas the 'because' motive comes on reflection, when we can turn back after a time to past action as an observer. Participants are making sense of their activity both past and planned, weaving it into a coherent story. They explain motivations for undertaking an IT programme. These include 'because' motives such as having an interest in IT, its availability on Springboard, etc. 'In order to' motives include the employment potential or the prospect of rewarding work. This is represented in the model by intention / reflection, where narratability and adaptable activity overlap (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Overlap of Narratability and Adaptable Activity



Secondly then, while LaPointe (2010) argues that career identities are re-constructed and co-constructed in the telling, there are elements that participants hold dear, that they consider to be essential to their own identity that they need to remain true to, for their personal well-being. Three examples here illustrate how people integrate their sense of themselves into their career identity.

> That didn't work. Basically my personality, I couldn't-, I'm a project guy, not a process guy. Process is the same thing day in day out, day in day out. I just couldn't handle it.
>
> (Tom 8, p.132)
>
> I'd consider myself a people person, I just work better with people… there's one or two guys there when they get in the zone, it's like headphones on, it's like get work done and they're good at it. I don't think I could do that, I'd lose my nut just sitting there on my own.
>
> (Fred 9, p.153)
>
> I think I'm more of a problem solver than a repetitiveness and I think that was the problem.
>
> (Anna 6, p.111)

People have stories that they tell to themselves, which creates meaning from the experience. The story changes and people adapt, but not endlessly, there are some elements we are

more comfortable with and as a result very attached to. Participants here describe work that did not hold meaning for them and was problematic. The negativity of that experience is described as a physical pain, or something that impacted on mental health. LaPointe asserts that 'some of the identity positions a person occupies become more permanent and are habitually adopted in given interactional contexts while others are more temporary' (2010, p. 3). This is consistent with Savickas' (2013) career construction theory which maintains that we rehearse behaviours and habits over time, and 'develop skills and aptitudes that become known as our personality or *reputation'* (p.153). Participants reimagine themselves, in the context of choosing a particular programme of study and how they engage with the programme of study, within the structure of their family lives, their financial capital, their geographical location etc. Participants demonstrate adaptability on placement but they are both limited and / or enabled by their negotiated activity and relationships within the structure of internship. They live the working experience, then make sense of, and create meaning from the working experience as they tell it, both to themselves and to others. Meaning-making is explored as the final theme below.

6.6 Meaning-Making

Park (2010) notes that 'although difficult to define, the notion of meaning as central to human life is a popular one' (p.257). Schultheiss (2006) explores the theme of the meaning of work, as embedded in people's lives. This meaning is dependent on a feeling of belonging and inclusion in some sort of community. Claire describes her experience in a previous work role, of working in the city at a high level.

> [It was] great - it was cutting edge because, you know, you were dressing up every day, meeting people let's say, you were dealing with large corporate stuff. So you know, you're busy, full on there, it was very busy actually… Oh, I loved it and I would have stayed in London maybe forever … you knew where you stood with them, they worked hard, they partied hard and they rewarded you, you know I always had a good income level.
>
> (Claire 4, p.84)

All the functions of work (Blustein et al. 2008) are being fulfilled, survival, power, social connection, self-determination. Claire describes a sense of belonging that includes being valued financially and as part of the team. She refers to trust and knowing 'where you stood'. Relational elements are positive and extend past work into the social realm. Joe describes a previous work role as a consultant where he felt valued and rewarded, both financially and personally, and again he mentions trust.

> Yes so, I really enjoyed working there. More and more, I was getting involved in working with training teams out there as well and doing teambuilding stuff as well…

> One thing that was a real buzz for me was when [my previous job] hired me back to do work with several of their teams again and that was a great feeling to know that they still trusted me and so on, that they were willing to pay me rather large sums of money [as a consultant].
>
> (Joe 12, p.191)

Participants are describing roles in which they have autonomy but belong to a group, for example, city professionals who dress up for work. They feel valued as part of the group, both valued financially, and for what they can bring in knowledge and skills.

Where meaning was absent from work roles in the past participants demonstrate an awareness of that. Anna describes the atmosphere of a previous job as 'dreadful' and in addition the work was not fulfilling.

> Finance, it was just mind numbing, I hated it from day one. I shouldn't have gone in on the second day, would you ever go to a job like that and I was there five years. I thought I was never going to get out of there.
>
> (6, p. 111)

In this work role the function of survival alone is being fulfilled, and she did not feel empowered to explore a change of jobs. The expression 'mind numbing' describes the absence of purpose and its physical impact. On reflection, she is incredulous that she persisted in work that she hated. The loss of meaning at work is shared by Brian who felt unfulfilled in his role, and then a crisis developed in the company where he was working.

> The whole place was converted almost overnight, there was a horrible atmosphere. But not only that, years before that I kind of knew that I wasn't developing myself at all. I was doing the role, I was earning a good wage, I was able to manage the pressure that I was under up to that point, but I was getting no satisfaction out of the job.
>
> (13, p.199)

Here Brian describes how he was doing a job that he was competent at, and getting well paid, but when the positive relational aspect of the work was diminished, the work was no longer rewarding. In this study, the over-arching activity of meaning-making is where the experience returns. Participants are looking for work that aligns with their sense of themselves, their sense of the world and where they fit into the world.

Two participants went to work in family businesses when they could not see other options in the jobs market. While the relational elements of this work were positive, the self-determination function was not being fulfilled and the work was not meaningful. Fred described that this work was 'second nature, I'd been doing it since I was probably 12,13, 14…' but he felt the need for a greater challenge and prior to coming on the programme was asking himself 'what is important and I don't want to be in here in ten years being depressed

off my head' (9, p.152). He is considering the importance of work to his well-being, for him, work needs to be rewarding and challenging. Eithne describes a similar situation working for a family business.

> But I felt like I wasn't really doing the work that I wanted to do. No, I didn't feel validated with that because I felt I was there because I had to be there.
>
> (5, p.100)

This suggests that participants will take a chance on leaving a safer option, in order to reskill and explore work that is potentially more rewarding.

Amundson et al. found in their study of career decisions, that meaningful engagement 'elicited positive emotions such as happiness, enthusiasm, excitement, peacefulness, contentment, and pleasure' (2010, p. 342). Participants describe a sense of well-being around successes and contributions during work placement. This is often described as a physical sensation.

> When it came to the end of the project, yeah it was stressful, but I felt I was fizzing as well, lovely.
>
> (Elinor 3, p.67)
>
> There were a couple of days when we would test-, say, a message type and it worked and you thought 'Yeah, this is good, this is worthwhile.' You get a good buzz when that happens.
>
> (Tom 8, p.130)
>
> I went to Turin at the end of October and I went on my own and did presentations there and as the work package leader I had to coordinate all of that when I was at the meeting. It was amazing.
>
> (Seán 14, p.214)

These positive emotions indicate a sense of personal meaning, that is accomplished when a task is completed. Personal autonomy is experienced and the outcome contributes to the working goals of a group.

6.7 Conclusion

Returning to the concept of punctum, a participant phrase that represents the collective experience is 'my real stumbling block was getting in the door' (Eithne 5, p. 94). Participants demonstrate a willingness and ability to reinvent themselves. When access to the work place is supported, participants are carving meaning from tasks and relationships. Participants are reflexive in identifying the sort of work that is meaningful to them - work that is purposeful within a positive social context. This punctum also represents the power of language in the context of work and career. The door is shut to participants and they are left outside and excluded. The supported re-entry to the workforce opens the door.

Participants are now returning to the workforce with skills and experience, but at an entry level. Their status within the context of work has shifted from previous experience, they are now given less responsibility, and have an internship status among colleagues. There is a need to make sense of this change in a meaningful way. Brian articulates the challenge this presents to his sense of self, and how he hopes to readjust his career identity within his role as an intern.

> Coming from the environment where you knew how everything worked and suddenly it-, personally, it's hard to take in a lot of ways, even though you know it's just because of the situation, it's not that you've lost your intellect or anything like that, it just means you're not familiar. It can be a bit unsettling, but I feel if I get that site out and live, that people will see you a bit differently and then hopefully other opportunities will come out.
>
> (Brian 13, p.207)

Participants are looking to move back to positions where they can contribute, Fred considers he will no longer be 'bottom of the food chain' when he is 'there to try and fix things' (9, p.149-150). It is in fixing things that he is contributing to the work of the team and feeling purposeful.

Work placement presents a challenge to the participants in how they engage with new work and new relationships, how they internalise the experience and make sense of it to themselves, and then how they come to tell their career story. However, participants demonstrate high levels of adaptability and willingness to reinvent themselves. The experience of the research participants demonstrates that supporting mature learners in reskilling for work that holds purpose and meaning, contributes to the development of an adaptable workforce. Fred explains what he wants from work.

> So what do I want out of work? What I want out of work is to make as much money doing something I like, something I like being the priority. I don't mind having less money in my life if I'm happier.
>
> (9, p.153)

The *Model of Meaning-Making in Work Transitions* represents the key realms of experience in work transitions for the participants in this study. By attending to these realms, practitioners in HE can improve support for mature cohorts who are looking to reinvent themselves in their working lives.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The incentive to undertake this research came from personal experience of the Springboard initiative. I delivered support through professional development modules on Springboard programmes in 2013 and 2014. These student groups bring more age and experience to the classroom than typical undergraduate cohorts (HEA 2014). In addition, as the eligibility criteria is that participants are job seekers, the groups have been through the disempowering experience of unemployment. I was interested in what it is like to make a career change through necessity, and also in understanding the experience of being a mature intern. My motivation was so that I could be in a better position to support mature groups pursuing career changes and undertaking work placements as part of their programme of study.

Since the economic downturn, beginning in 2008, Ireland has been through a major recession, and this has been deeply felt in the South-East region. Reflective of many in the region, the participants in this study are mature members of the workforce settled in the region, with family networks, who have felt the impact of reduced employment opportunities. The study is contextualised within current and emerging career theory that recognizes the nature of the working world has changed with the arrival of the globalised economy (e.g. Nota and Rossier 2015). Workers are unlikely to maintain careers within a single organisation or occupation. Rather, Savickas (2015) describes the world of work in the 21st century as VUCA, 'that is, volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous' (p. 137). This study aligns with the work being undertaken by the Life Design International Research Group, which was created in 2006 (Nota and Rossier 2015) and published a position paper in the Journal of Vocational Behaviour in 2009 (Savickas et al.). The life design approach, and this study, are embedded in the epistemology of social constructionism, that is based on the premise that knowledge, identity and meaning are produced in social and cultural contexts.

The research retains an in-vivo approach in the presentation of participant experience by presenting multiple participant stories and extracts. The intention is to allow the reader to hear and understand the experience through participant narrative. 'Anecdotes bring things into nearness by contributing to the vividness and presence of an experience' (Van Manen 2014, p.251). Themes in the career literature are identified that align with those emerging from the study. Five key themes are proposed as residing in the experience of making work transitions. A visual framework of these themes is offered to facilitate a structured analysis

of the data. In this chapter I will outline the key findings of the study. This has implications for practice in HE, and for areas of further research. First the limitations of the research are noted.

7.2 Limitations of the Research

The aim of the research was to look at the experience of mature students on accredited work placement programmes at WIT. It is not proposed that the experience presented here is applicable to every Springboard student experience at WIT, or elsewhere in Ireland. As a piece of phenomenological research, the purpose of the findings is to deepen understanding and see the experience of the mature intern afresh. It is not intended however, that the experience presented is generalizable to a wider population. One consideration is the fact that the participant group belong in the cohort that has successfully completed their taught modules. The study does not engage in the experience of those participants who did not complete their programme of study, though this represents a significant proportion of those who enrol on Springboard programmes. For example, in WIT between 2011 and 2014, between 8% (in 2014), and 51% (in 2011) were unsuccessful in completing their programme of study (HEA 2016).

The participants in this study demonstrate the ability to reinvent themselves. In delimiting the research, it was decided that looking to antecedents and influencers on adaptability was beyond the scope of this research study. It is recognised however, in the Context section, that participants are in relatively privileged situations, when considering the workforce both nationally and internationally. While participants demonstrate a need to secure paid work, economics are not a key driver. It is not presumed that this finding would apply to other contexts, where individuals have less social, economic and educational capital.

7.3 Key Findings and Implications

The study adds to emerging career literature which emphasises the need for individuals to self-construct their careers within their own contexts and through insecure work pathways. This is the purpose of the life-design paradigm (e.g. Savickas et al 2009, Nota & Rossier eds 2015). Self-construction then is central to this approach. Guichard (2012) for example posits that 'a strategic behaviour is only possible if the person has a "sense of self"' (p. 300). The key contribution of this research is to place meaning-making at the centre of the life-design

process. This is to acknowledge that the pursuit of meaning in life is inextricably linked to a sense of self. Through meaning-making, in our work and in our lives, we create and recreate our sense of ourselves. Meaning-making is where context, relationships, horizons of opportunity, and the ability to articulate our lives and work knit together. This is articulated in the model *Meaning-making in Work Transitions* and as its title indicates, it is designed to reflect and inform the experience of people who are in mature adulthood and negotiating transitions into and out of education and the workplace.

Guichard (2012) suggests that there are three major ways in which people can be helped to design and construct their lives and work – information, guidance and counselling. Guichard describes that in the first instance, providing information can inform clients or students as to the types of opportunities available and the necessary requirements. More focused guidance then requires reflection from a student or client, to consider their own experiences and competencies in order to plan their career. The purpose of counselling is more fundamental and 'is to assist people in developing the reflexivity they need to design their lives' (Guichard 2012, p. 308). While individual counselling is desirable, it is not always practically possible, and the *Meaning-making in Work Transitions* model can serve as a tool in group contexts to enhance student or client reflexivity. Integrating the model into interventions of providing information and guidance can encourage a person to reflect on their own priorities and dispositions, and help to bring a person closer to a reflexive approach to life and career planning. The use of the model as a discussion tool can be appropriate and possible in classroom contexts, where there is potential to develop individual and group activities both class-based and online, using the themes of context, adaptable activity, relationality, narratability, and at the centre meaning-making.

7.3.1 Implications for Higher Education

The study presents implications for HE in supporting cohorts on reskilling programmes. Each element of the proposed model will be considered in turn. First, the context is the realm within which we live. It can both enable and impede our ability to achieve a sense of meaning and worth in our lives. While multifaceted and complex, sites of power and disempowerment within contexts include economics and access to education. The Springboard initiative has provided improved access to HE for participants who are motivated to undertake new learning and re-imagine their role in the paid work force. The provision of programmes and opportunities for life-long learners is becoming increasingly

pertinent with the need for reskilling for emerging industries. Continued provision of free college places in areas of identified market potential would allow others to access similar opportunities and continue to improve access to life-long learning.

The imperative behind the Springboard initiative is financial, and ultimately the aim of participants is to gain paid employment. The opportunity given by free college places enabled re-entry into the workforce. According to the HEA's report in 2015, 100% of those on ICT conversion programmes were successful in securing employment within six months, while 49% of all graduates of Springboard Level 8 programmes had secured employment in six months (HEA 2015, p.12). The success of the programme then is undeniable in achieving its aims of supporting re-entry to the workforce. While Government policy indicates that the need for Springboard funded programmes as a 'focused labour market activation programme' (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation 2015, p. 24) is likely to diminish as the economy picks up, the experience of this cohort suggests otherwise. If there is only a need to improve access to HE during times of recession, then economics is the only driver. That does not resonate with participants' stories.

If the South-East is to develop and innovate, an educated adaptive work force is necessary. It is evident that participants are committed to the region. Rather than rely on attracting highly educated personnel from beyond the region, it is desirable to improve access to reskilling to those who are willing, capable and in situ. The commitment of the participants to the region is connected with their family obligations, and relates to their stage in the life span. WIT states in its mission that 'we educate and inspire a life-long passion for learning, exploration and discovery' (2016, online). Currently, mature entrants (over the age of 23) account for 18% of the student cohort at WIT (HEA 2015d, p.128) and the number of students over the age of 30 or 40 is likely to be significantly lower. In order to attract and retain life-long learners, the HE sector needs to develop how it can tailor support to meet the needs of mature cohorts.

The second theme of the study is adaptable activity. Savickas defines adapting as 'bringing inner needs and outer opportunities into harmony' (2013, p. 157). This definition aligns with the study's emphasis on meaning-making. Savickas looks at career adaptability resources and identifies four dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (2013). In HE, it is possible to support the development of these dimensions. Currently, the consideration of

career preparation is on the periphery of HE programmes in Ireland. In WIT for example, the careers office has one fulltime and one part-time member of staff, for a student body of 8,500 (2016, online). Accredited Professional Development modules are a recommended element of Springboard. Professional Development modules, where they exist, include cv and online profile building, interview skills. These modules can introduce principles of reflective practice and allow participants the space to consider their career influences and goals. There are many useful career counselling resources available (e.g. AHECS 2015, Reid 2016) that draw on emerging career ideas. Currently in Irish HE however, the space for presenting and exploring these ideas is limited.

Participants consider the work placement opportunity as invaluable in making a career transition. The provision of work placement aligns with government objectives in the National Skills Strategy 2025. The objective is that all full-time students on programmes in HE from level 6 – level 8 will have a work placement element as part of their programme of study (Department of Education and Skills 2016, p.117). For the mature learner in a phase of work transition, the research demonstrates that the placement element is vital. As the participant Eithne observed, this facilitates 'getting in the door', at which point this cohort take on responsibility for their placement experience. The participants' life experience and self-awareness is evident in the findings, and so their needs on placement differ to undergraduate interns. Through engagement with the model of *Meaning-Making in Work Transitions*, placement supports specific to the needs of mature cohorts can be considered.

Following on from this, the third research theme relationality came to the fore in the participant experience. The importance of negotiating work placement expectations is highlighted. The experience of this group can help inform how HE prepares students for internships, and what structures and supports are put in place (e.g. the tripartite agreement and continued support). It cannot be presumed that because participants are mature people with experience of the workplace, that they are empowered to negotiate this new internship relationship. Participants highlighted the positive relational dimensions of the college experience. This can be nurtured by enhancing peer learning and team building opportunities for these cohorts. This could be embedded in the delivery or assessment of technical modules.

The fourth element in the model is narratability. The navigation of work and family life is presented as a constant challenge. The sort of language used to describe the concepts in our working lives can be very powerful, in terms of how we understand our own worth and potential, and how we share that understanding with others, within any given culture. There is a need for new ways of imagining how we talk about the intersection of relationships and career. This is of particular relevance to those who take time from work for caring purposes, and find it a particular challenge to contextualise this personal work within marketplace work. Schultheiss (2006) argues that the term work / life balance is unhelpful, as an unachievable conceptual goal, and suggests the use of the term navigation to describe how we manage and combine personal and market work.

Career theory has evolved new terms and concepts for considering work trajectories, for example Sugarman (2004) proposes an image of the life structure as evolving 'through alternating structure-changing and structure-building phases' (p.9). Concepts such as this help to normalise change that continues throughout adulthood. However, the image of the linear career persists in the collective mind, and when this is disproved it is undermining. Reimagining how we talk about work and career is one step towards creating concepts that reflect the reality of working lives. This can help to empower people in their work tasks and decisions, both in personal care work, and in paid and unpaid market work. Professional Development modules in HE can introduce, and together with participants, co-create alternative images and language to represent work.

The fifth and central element of the proposed model is meaning-making. The study benefits from the honesty and reflexive ability of participants to articulate what they seek from work. The study has emphasised the use of story to illuminate understanding. The use of narrative can similarly be explored in career preparation, to equip participants with the ability to story and re-story their working life. In doing so a coherent working self can be created that resonates with a personal sense of meaning. The experience of the research participants demonstrates that government support for reskilling, for work that holds purpose and meaning, contributes to the development of an adaptable workforce.

7.4 Recommendations for Further Research

The study looks at the experience of mature interns on work placement. It is intended that this research can inform practitioners in HE involved with provision of life-long learning

opportunities. However, in order to improve supports for access and retention, it is necessary to research and further understand the experience of those who don't consider pursuing reskilling qualifications, and those who do, but have been unable to complete those programmes.

The participants included both men and women in equal numbers. While perspectives that are gender and ethnicity influenced are included here, there is scope for further research that focuses on the similarities and differences in the experiences of men and women, and those who are Irish born or who have immigrated to Ireland. Market work and personal work are sites of gender and racial politics. DeBell for example outlines that in the American context, women continue to earn 77c on the dollar compared to men, and continue to carry the personal work load of parenting and housework, while engaging too in market work (DeBell 2006). The only non-Irish born participant in the study describes an experience that differed to others in his attempts to gain paid employment locally following graduation from his programme of study. The experience of women and those from minority communities seeking re-entry to the workforce is in need of further investigation.

7.5 Closing Comments

I am reminded that Van Manen asserts that 'the ultimate aim of phenomenology of practice is modest: to nurture a measure of thoughtfulness and tact in the practice of our professions and in everyday life' (2014, p.31). As the researcher, this aim has been achieved. Through attentive engagement with the participant experience, my practice in the classroom is changing. Included as Appendix H is my own attempt at exploring alternative visual metaphors for my career journey. This was completed in a Professional Development class with BA (Visual Art) students at WIT earlier this week. Each of the group, from the age of 20 to 50, created and shared visual metaphors for their past and anticipated working life. Through exercises such as this, I can begin to support students to conceptualise and express stories of work that resonate with their lived experience. That experience, as the study shows, is multifaceted and changing rather than linear and predictable.

As is appropriate to the study, the final comments belong to a participant. Joe articulates here the need for enabling change in working life beyond the need experienced in economic crisis.

In terms of the Springboard, I think it's a really, really great scheme. I couldn't say enough about it because-, and it's not even just an economy thing, I think it needs to be there the whole time because people will get to a point in their life where they'll just go, 'What have I been doing for the last ten years? I actually want to do this, I shouldn't be here, I shouldn't be doing this.' and if there isn't a mechanism that will make it easy for them to go out and reskill and a mechanism that-, and this is very important, this placement bit because that creates the opportunity.

(Joe 12, p.197)

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview guide

Interview will begin with a short discussion around confidentiality

Tell me about your first day on placement,
PROMPT: can you remember walking in there for the first time? Describe that for me.

Can you describe the office set-up for me?
PROMPT: Can you draw a rough outline of it while you talk me through it?

What work did they putting you doing on the first day?
PROMPT: Is/was this new to you?

Tell me about a time that you found it tricky?
Was that the work itself, or the relationships. Tell me about the work. Can you describe for me a particular day that you felt it difficult?

Can you tell me about your relationship with your work placement line manager?
PROMPT (where participant currently on placement): Can you talk me through when you last spoke to your work placement line manager?
PROMPT (where participant completed placement in the past): How did you report to them? Who did you go to with a problem?

Can you tell me a bit more about how you feel / felt about the role that is/was assigned to you?
PROMPTS: Do / did you find it energising or tiring?
Can you describe a time when you felt energised?
Can you describe a time when you felt tired?

How does/did the work environment on placement compare to work environments you have / had worked within in the past?

How does/did the work you were doing here compare to work you have/had done in the past?

Appendix B

DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

Plain Language Statement

I. Introduction to the Research Study

My name is Fionnuala Brennan and I am studying for a Professional Doctorate in Education in the School of Education Studies, Dublin City University. I am completing a piece of research that will explore the experience of those who have gone from unemployment or previous self-employment onto higher education programmes through the Springboard government initiative 2011 – 2016. My contact details are fionnuala.brennan26@mail.dcu.ie / 087 2831765.

II. Details of what involvement in the Research Study will require

I would be grateful for the opportunity to talk to you about your experience of returning to education on the Springboard programme. This will involve an interview of between one and two hours in duration. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. You will be given a copy of the interview transcript to allow an opportunity for changes or amendments. Your identity will be anonymised in the research and any personal data will remain confidential throughout.

II. **Potential risks to participants from involvement in the Research Study (if greater than that encountered in everyday life)**

The only risk is the disclosure of confidential information and this is dealt with in section V below.

IV. Benefits (direct or indirect) to participants from involvement in the Research Study

Participating in this research will help you to reflect on your experience on the Springboard programme, and contribute to academic research on how Higher Education supports students on similar programmes. A summary report of the research findings will be made available to all participants.

V. Data Protection

In accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 & 2003, electronic raw data (such as audio recordings and transcripts) will be saved as password-protected files on computers fitted with anti-virus software. Physical raw data (such as hand written notes etc.) to be held for six years in physically secure researcher's archives; and a copy of all original data to be retained by the researcher with an electronic password for a period of six years.

Involvement in the research study is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw at any time without consequence.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:
The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice-President for Research, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000

Appendix C

DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY
Informed Consent Form

I. Working and Learning Lives, Springboard Student Perspectives
Fionnuala Brennan, who is studying for a Professional Doctorate in Education in the School of Education Studies, Dublin City University, has asked me to participate in this field study.

II. Clarification of the purpose of the research
I understand that the research will explore the experience of returning to higher education through the Springboard government initiative 2011 – 2016. I agree to give Fionnuala the opportunity to interview me about my own personal experience. I understand that the interviews will be recorded and transcribed. I understand that should I wish that to read and amend the transcription, I can request to do so. I understand that my identity will be anonymised in the research. I will receive a summary report of the research findings.

III. Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement
I have agreed the time, duration, place and conditions of the interview /s.

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)	
I have read the Plain Language Statement	*Yes/No*
I understand the information provided	*Yes/No*
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study	*Yes/No*
I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions	*Yes/No*
I am aware that my interview will be audiotaped	*Yes/No*

IV. Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary
I understand that I may withdraw from the Research Study at any point without consequence. I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Participants Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

Ethical Approval Dublin City University

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

DCU

Ms Fionnuala Brennan
School of Education Studies

26th June 2014

REC Reference: **DCUREC/2014/144**

Proposal Title: **'Working and learning lives', Springboard student perspectives**

Applicants: **Ms Fionnuala Brennan, Prof. Gerard McNamara**

Dear Fionnuala,

This research proposal qualifies under our Notification Procedure, as a low risk social research project. Therefore, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal. Materials used to recruit participants should state that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

DCU
Research & Innovation

Donal O'Mathuna

Dr. Donal O'Mathuna
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee

Taighde & Nuálaíocht Tacaíocht
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Appendix E

Ethical Approval Waterford Institute of Technology

Institiúid Teicneolaíochta Phort Láirge Waterford Institute *of* Technology

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Waterford, Ireland.
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Ref: 15/EX/03

27th May 2015

Dr. Michael Harrison,
Head of Department of Health, Sport and Exercise Science,
School of Health Sciences,
Waterford Institute *of* Technology,
Waterford

Dear Fionnuala,

Thank you for bringing your project *'Working and learning lives', Springboard student perspectives'* to the attention of the WIT Research Ethics Committee.

I am pleased to inform you that we approve the conduct of this project, and we will convey this to Academic Council, subject to the following:-

1. You will use a gatekeeper to make contact with the students.
2. Consider using an office telephone number as opposed to a personal mobile number on the Plain Language Statement.

We wish you well in the work ahead.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Michael Harrison,
Acting Chairperson,
WIT Research Ethics Committee

Appendix F

Sample Data Analysis

I:	Yes absolutely. Yes, yes, yes.		
R:	That's the way men communicate at a bar, you know or sitting at the race track or whatever or at a game. Whereas, women are more inclined to go face to face. So it was interesting.		
I:	It is yes and I will try that out [unclear 00:01:19]. So listen, what I wanted to hear about I suppose, is around that you came onto the Springboard programme to take a change in direction.		
R:	Yes, [laughs] to get away from people more specifically.		
I:	How do you mean?		
R:	It's just while nursing is very-, uhm, I'm the type that I can't see somebody in distress or who needs help without jumping in and ah, not interfering, but helping and ah, it's the same in nursing. Like you'd have a certain job to do, but there's always something else, uhm, that may need to be done that it'll always suck up, ah, work wise or time wise or sit with somebody and listen to them or all that kind of intangible stuff.		
I:	So did you feel that that was taking too much of you?		
R:	Oh it was taking too much of my energy, absolutely and you get drawn into, you know, people's problems and stuff and then-, which they need, which is part of the role, but the way the health service went, that wasn't-, that used to be an acknowledged part of it when it was more a vocational training and was very much part of it, particularly with some of the Nuns that you'd have in charge of you.		
I:	Part of the ethos.		
R:	That was very much-, and depending on the department that you worked on, like when you were paediatrics or-, uhm, actually with any of them that I worked with it was a part of it, that you would give them time, but as I went through the profession, that just was not-, it's like, "Do your job." You're given a list of tasks that had to be completed in a certain time and that's it and I found that very frustrating, not being able to-, a most holistic view and-.		
I:	Come here, when did you kind of come to that realisation?		

Appendix G

Sample of Reflective Writing

Extract from Reflective Journal
(full journal submitted to supervisor)

Thursday 2nd July 2015

After reading Douglas Hall 2004 and the Protean career, I wrote this career self assessment in answer to the question: what messages about work did I receive early in life?

I learned I suppose that work is an integral part of life. For us it was a family activity, not segmented to individuals. The shop was a group thing, Dad's obviously and he held all the responsibility but the work was a group activity to some extent. We all contributed by working behind the counter, unloading, pricing stock. For the most part my memories are largely around stressful times with the shop, preparing for the summer sale and pricing down items individually, and there was a very keen tension. We were getting the job done, working to deadline.

While we felt that Dad was preoccupied with his work, he was in fact very present in the routine of our lives. He was there at every meal, preparing breakfast, coming home for lunch and dinner.

With the work for the flats, cleaning weekely in the summer etc, we all shared those tasks. There was a clear message that it was to our mutual benefit. I don't know was it actually repeatedly said, but we knew that the flats were 'our college fees'.

Some messages gained:

- It's good to work hard, in fact the prosperity of the family depends on it.

From my mother:

Studying is good and it pays off. She went to college and had the beginnings of a career as a teacher. Her own mother was a primary school teacher and worked throughout her parenting to my knowledge. Very unusual in her generation to go to college. Same with my grandfather, her husband. He won a scholarship – story of cycling the distance to sit the exam which was moved from Sligo (which was too far to cycle) to Roscommon. His good fortune and privilege to have a third level education. He became the Master in a village school. Commanded great respect. I saw this visiting Roscommon with Mum.

From Evangeline:

Academic success is a great achievement, more than material success. Especially for women. She told me I was the first woman in the family to have an MA. Writing this I feel an emotional sadness. I'm reminded that when I started the Ed Doc I thought I would dedicate it to Evangeline if I ever finished. She was always very proud of academic success. Not that I ever felt any pressure from her. But I probably had the impression that it meant more to her than it did to Mum, who takes a more holistic view of work in and out of the home.

So they both had careers, dentist and teacher, as did the women on Dad's side – Peggy, Agnes & Frances all nurses, Eileen a Dominican nun and a leader in educational reform in SA. All very strong personalities, capable women. Message gained here:

- It's possible to explore your career potential as a woman.

Mum was cautionary about how this can challenge family life and the role of as mother. She was saying this last week again, with Clíodhna's leaving cert subjects, that teaching is the only way for women, the only viable career to match work and family, to balance those. Message here:

- Women need to carry family responsibility, (more of it? I don't feel I do) They ought to, or at least will be glad if they make career decisions with their family in mind. She did encourage the boys into teaching too mind you.

Looking at it my father exercised great autonomy in his career. He trained as a guard and then left the guards after three years to run the Post Office, the family business in Tramore. It's likely he was summoned home to do that I think, but then he opened the shop within a few years, changed premises, let go the Post office. Very entrepreneurial. Message:

- You can make things happen for yourself in your working life.

The stress and pressure of managing your own business seems to have been received as a message too. None of us have gone into business or self-employment. All eight of us work for public service, or private industry / NGO.

- Self-employment brings too much stress on a family, and it's better to have a salaried career.

Also should say something about working hard –

- It is good to go above and beyond, be proactive, see what needs to be done and do it.

Highest compliment 'she's a great worker', Dad still says that about people who might have worked for him 40 or 50 years ago. This message has been a negative for some of our spouses, prioritising work, giving 110% to it.

Another message that Dad relayed was around financial security, surprisingly maybe as he generated security for himself. He couldn't see or at least was concerned, legitimately of course, how I could sustain a stable income in cultural management. He was delighted when I went touring with Riverdance.

Appendix H

Sample of Exploratory Visual Metaphor for Working Journey