

**No intention to learn:
Unintentional learning from the assessment of competence**

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requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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This thesis was completed as part of the
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Declaration

This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other
degree or diploma

Signature

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Abstract

This aim of this study was to examine what, and how, candidates learn from participating in an assessment of competence process where there is no explicit intention to learn. The awarding body, advisors and candidates focus on the assessment process as a route to membership and appear blind to the potential for learning from assessment. It was clear in this study that candidates pursued this route to membership precisely because it met their expressed motives to gain professional status and credibility with clients; a requirement for their current job role or for future roles - none claimed a motive to learn but they did recognise that overall the process was developmental. Advisors also acknowledged that candidates were pursuing this route for the outcome rather than for what development might happen during the process. The research addressed the questions of the role of narrative and of the advisor in the assessment of competence and what learning occurred as a result of the assessment process. This was driven by an interest in the applications of narrative in the assessment process and the research analysis. Candidates told the stories of their experience of the process and provided copies of their written accounts explaining how the evidence of their work met the assessment criteria. Advisors told the stories of their experiences with candidates. These sources were analysed using a methodological process of narrative inquiry from a social constructivist perspective. The findings showed evidence of learning occurring as a result of the assessment of competence process, beyond that required from the assessment criteria and standards, in the three areas of propositional, process, and personal learning. The role of written narrative as an artefact was important in motivating candidates: where they could see their portfolio growing. The role of the advisor was both as a mentor: directing and supporting; and as a coach: enabling and facilitating. Advisors offered an extra dimension to the candidates' reflections by interpreting the standards; making connections between the standards and the candidates' work experience; and giving formative feedback. The role of the advisor incorporated reflection and social learning: through helping candidates to make meaning of their experiences and expanding their stories, candidates moved from sense making to transformative learning, from surface to deep approaches to learning. Unintended learning should not be a surprise output from the competence assessment process: learning will occur despite the focus on the assessment of learning and despite there being no formal acknowledgement of assessment for learning. Because the process includes re-engagement with work experiences, written and spoken reflective processes, a deep approach to learning can ensue. There are possible applications of this research in the areas of competence assessment; academic tutorials; supervision or appraisal discussions; assessment and development centres; mentoring and coaching, where the use of competences, written and spoken narratives come together to enable learning from the process itself.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Areas of interest

In my work as an Occupational Psychologist and management development practitioner I am involved in many areas of work that focus on learning, competence, assessment and combinations of these. I have a portfolio of roles which include: designing and delivering management development programmes for qualifications at all levels; short development courses; assessing management competence against national standards for qualifications; assessing management competence in Assessment or Development Centres against organisations' competence frameworks; and coaching individual managers.

Most of the work that I do is concerned with encouraging and enabling people to learn through andragogical, canonical management development activities in the form of short modules or longer qualification based programmes. With these, there is a defined intention to learn expressed as Learning Outcomes or Assessment Criteria which are assessed through assignments, presentations or work based reports. When assessing for qualifications the emphasis is focused on the application of the canon to the students themselves or their workplace which leads to their professional or personal development. With shorter modules that are not assessed there is still the intention for participants to learn and apply what they have learned to their management practice, and this again would be determined by what the students were expected to learn, which might be expressed as course aims and objectives.

I work as an Assessor in two distinct ways: firstly as an assessor of competence based on evidence from the workplace – assessing candidates in relation to national standards for them to obtain a management qualification. There is definitely a learning element with this as candidates are not only expected to demonstrate what they do, in terms of their performance described as 'Outcomes of Effective Performance' or 'Operational Indicators', but also what they know, again in relation to what the national standards say they should know – often described as 'Knowledge and Understanding'. This performance and knowledge is related to what they actually do at work rather than scenarios, simulations or written assignments. Secondly I have assessed candidates' competence at Assessment or Development Centres. Here they are expected to demonstrate that they are competent in relation to a set of competences either for selection for employment or promotion, or to identify areas for development, in scenarios or work related exercises (such as meetings or drafting reports in response to scenarios). In assessment centre situations, whether for

selection or development, candidates are given feedback in order for them to further improve their performance or their knowledge: there is a specific developmental aspect to them.

In the first of these situations, where competence is being assessed against standards, candidates will often describe what they have learned from the process in addition to the underpinning knowledge that they are specifically expected to demonstrate. This is an acknowledgement by students of the learning that occurs through reflection on their own performance. This anecdotal acknowledgement was an initial driver for this research and was what I explored previously in my Learning Teaching and Assessment assignment for the Doctoral programme.

I was also interested in the concepts around storytelling and their application in learning situations, and how a storytelling approach could facilitate learning, particularly a deep approach to learning. I could envisage that the assessment of competence had similarities with storytelling in many ways. Also I felt that there was a lot that assessors of competence could learn from viewing their work through a social constructivist, storytelling and narrative framework to enable candidates' learning.

1.2 Research context

In my work there are situations when I am assessing the competence of experienced practitioners for membership of a professional body and I am assessing a candidate's competence, but learning is not a specific, intended outcome of the process. My Doctoral assignment for Learning Teaching and Assessment looked at the type of learning that occurs during Human Resource Managers' (HR) professional assessment of competence (PAC) for membership of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). This process contrasts with the traditional academic four year route to membership of CIPD of studying at an educational institution and, as such, is not intended to 'teach' anything nor are the candidates expected to 'learn' anything. They are expected to demonstrate the knowledge and practice they have gained as HR managers. PAC and the academic route led to the same result of obtaining Chartered membership, but PAC candidates were not specifically expected to learn anything from the process; rather they produced a portfolio of evidence of their work to demonstrate their competence and knowledge against a set of standards.

The PAC process of assessment was based on the CIPD criteria in four areas or fields. The four fields of criteria, or standards, were firstly 'People Management and Development' (PM&D); secondly, nineteen elective topics (from which the candidate chose four of which they had experience and for which they could provide evidence) which covered elements such as 'Employment Law',

'Management Development' and 'Performance Management'; the third area 'Leadership and Management'; and fourthly the Applied Personnel and Development field where candidates produced a Management Research Report.

The process for an HR manager as a candidate consisted of an initial diagnostic interview to determine their suitability for this competence route. In order to be considered, a candidate needed to have been in a managerial role for at least five years, of which at least three years must have been in a people management and development (HR) role. They needed to be able to provide evidence that they had produced a range of work products against the criteria in the first three fields: People Management and Development, four of the electives, and Leadership and Management. For the fourth field they would be expected to research an aspect of HR as a project and write this as a report. Once their suitability had been determined, they were assigned an advisor who would work with them to advise them what from their experience would be relevant to meet the criteria, and how to produce the written account of their work experience. Candidates would produce a portfolio of their work as evidence and the explanation, story, or narrative, of their experience - described as a 'storyboard'. The candidate would meet their advisor at intervals for them to review the evidence and storyboards, give feedback and advice as necessary. Once the portfolio was complete, then a separate assessor would review it and consider the validity of the evidence against the criteria or standards; the currency of the evidence (it should be within the previous 3 years at the most); and the sufficiency of the evidence (was there enough evidence to conclude that the candidate was competent). The assessor would then prepare a set of questions for the candidate to explore the evidence and storyboards further. Following this, the assessor would conduct a Professional Discussion with the candidate to confirm the validity, currency and sufficiency of the evidence and also to determine its authenticity (if that was not apparent from the evidence itself or from an authentication statement from, for example, the candidate's line manager).

The PAC process was offered by CIPD as the awarding body, as an alternative to an academic route. The CIPD's PAC Centre Handbook (2006) stated that the PAC process

'is open to senior practitioners and offers a time-effective approach to gaining chartered membership of the CIPD... It offers significant advantage to those who might be looking for a way into membership that doesn't require enrolment on an extended, educational or traditional developmental route '

Therefore the CIPD itself is explicitly saying that PAC is not a developmental route. It is merely a route to membership and was devised to enable HR professionals to be assessed against the CIPD

standards in a way that recognises the experience they've gained over many years and are using regularly in their work. Because of the nature of the assessment method, it is essential that candidates are undertaking the activities detailed in the standards, since it is their actual performance that is being judged. It was also stated in the Centre Handbook (CIPD, 2006) that

'Clearly, if you're not active in a particular area, there's no current performance to assess'

The implication of this is that if a candidate is not performing the activities to be assessed, there is no opportunity or expectation that they can develop the other skills or knowledge as part of this programme. From the CIPD's point of view, PAC is merely a method of licensing with the offer of membership resulting from the process.

This obviously has a bearing on how the PAC process is viewed by candidates. If PAC is being offered as a quick route that avoids the *'extended, educational or traditional'* then that is how it will be seen by candidates. It will be thought of as an instrumental process by which they can gain membership. The benefits that the CIPD state from the PAC process relate to being a member rather than what candidates could gain from the process itself. There is no mention of the PAC process being one from which candidates could learn.

The effect of a programme such as PAC, and any similar approach based on the assessment of competences (Wolf, 1995) is to separate the process of learning from the process of assessment, accreditation and award. The assessment of competence process recognises what candidates have learned, with accreditation linked to the professional standards and the product for the candidate of the award of the qualification. The competence based approach fails to recognise that learning would also occur during the actual assessment process. The implication is that a competence based approach views learning in a particular way, and only values learning that relates to the standards or competences being assessed. A competence based approach is effectively blind to any learning that is beyond the standards being assessed, and is blind to learning that could occur during or as a result of the assessment process itself. The awarding bodies are therefore missing out on an aspect of learning that could be significant to the candidate, but because the learning does not relate to the standards it is not acknowledged.

According to the PAC Centre Handbook (CIPD, 2006) each PAC advisor must be licensed to operate within all of the subject areas that they are advising. The CIPD issues a licence to each advisor based on their existing CIPD membership, professional experience, and accreditation as a vocational assessor. The advisors' stated key roles are to support the candidate in preparing and presenting

their portfolio; to make formative assessment decisions about the candidate's performance and their knowledge and understanding; and how the requirements of the CIPD standards are to be met (CIPD, 2006). There is no mention of the possibility of advisors acting as coach or mentor or acting in any way to help candidates to learn anything from the process.

For the awarding body, candidates and advisors the emphasis is on PAC as a way of obtaining CIPD membership. The evidence of a candidate's competence must come from work that they have done rather than from new or planned developmental activities. There is no recognition or expectation that learning could occur as a result of the PAC process.

Where HR Managers as candidates are able to demonstrate their professionalism through the assessment of their competence against a set of national standards, many have stated that it has made them 'realise' something – so apparently they learn from the process. Learning seems to take place as a result of bringing together their professionalism and the assessment of their competence against a set of standards, through the reflecting and storytelling nature of their portfolio building and assessment activities. There is no reference to this level of learning in the assessment of competence literature or advice for advisors, assessors or candidates.

If learning does occur from such an assessment of competence process where there is no intention to learn, this could be emphasised by the Awarding bodies offering programmes such as PAC as routes to professional membership. Additional learning from this assessment process could be seen as beneficial by candidates but would need to be acknowledged, encouraged and enabled by awarding bodies and advisors.

I was interested in a number of questions. Did candidates intend to learn from the process of their assessment of competence? What did candidates learn and how did they learn it? To what extent did they acquire different types of knowledge? If the extent and type of learning could be established then it would also be of interest in other assessment situations. What was the advisor's role in candidates' learning? How did advisors see their role in competence assessment? What could be added to or enhanced in assessment situations? And what could principles of written and spoken storytelling, narrative or reflective practice bring to the assessment process in relation to candidates learning? The general principles of learning from a process that involves both written and spoken narrative: writing and talking about experiences, could then be acknowledged and applied both in

situations where there is explicitly no intention to learn, but also to enhance situations where there is an explicit intention to learn.

1.3 Research overview

I found that there has been little, if any, research into the extent and type of learning that takes place where there is no specific teaching or learning input, merely an assessment of competence. Nor has there been a specific examination of it through the framework of storytelling and narrative. Although there is evidence of research into learning from a storytelling or narrative approach, there was also limited evidence of what type of learning takes place. That is to say, what type of 'knowledge' is gained from the narrative process? Assuming that people do learn from a narrative approach, what sorts of things do they learn?

In this research, therefore, my aim was to bring together aspects of assessment and learning, assessment of competence, narrative and storytelling, and a typology of knowledge, examined through a framework of social constructivism. Narrative and storytelling is already used in many settings and in this research I have used and examined the principle of storytelling in a number of ways. Written narrative is used by candidates to describe their work experiences; spoken narrative is used with advisors and in the assessment interview. Narrative was used as the theoretical overview for the whole research piece where it was also used as the research method.

I was interested in two sources of data from the candidates: the storyboards the candidates write for their portfolios which describe their experiences and events as HR managers to meet the CIPD standards; and their experiences of the PAC process as evidenced through the conversations I had with candidates about their experience of the overall PAC process. This was a further use of narrative in that candidates told me the story of their PAC journey. Through a methodological process of narrative inquiry (Webster and Mertova, 2007), and using a social constructivist approach, I examined these two sources of data (storyboards and conversations), for examples of learning from the process and any relevance or reference to 'storytelling' principles and narrative processes and their learning.

I collected data from candidates' written explanations of their work, their 'storyboards', which described their experiences and events as HR managers to meet the CIPD standards. I had conversations with candidates where they described their stories of their assessment process including the assessment interviews with their assessors. My conversations with candidates elicited

their stories or 'narratives' of their assessment experience and events. Using narrative inquiry methods, I analysed the written work of candidates, produced as 'storyboards', and their advisory process as 'learning conversations'. I set out to identify learning that occurs as a result of these aspects of 'storytelling'.

I also collected data from advisors to further understand their views of the advisor's role in the assessment of competence process. In conversations with me they described what they did as advisors with their PAC candidates. I was interested to see the extent to which their views of their role concurred with the key roles as described in the PAC Centre Handbook (2006) and with the views of the candidates.

The analysis of these data sets addressed the following research aims and questions.

1.4 Research Questions

This aim of this study was to examine what, and how, candidates learn from participating in an assessment process, using written and spoken narrative processes, specifically where there is no intention to learn.

The research questions that this study set out to answer are:

- What is the role of narrative in the assessment of competence?
- What is the role of the advisor in the assessment of competence?
- What learning occurs during the assessment of competence where there is no intention to learn?

1.5 Framework of the thesis

The structure of this thesis follows a traditional route. A review of current literature provides a background to the topics that are relevant to the research questions around learning, assessment, competence, and narrative processes. The methodology and framework through which the research was viewed are explained. Then the findings from the study are discussed and conclusions drawn that relate to the wider issues of assessment and learning in different settings.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This study examined the mediating roles of narrative and the advisor (as audience and listener) in the assessment of competence process and learning that occurs from that process in a situation where specifically there is no intention to learn. There appears to be little or no acknowledgement in the literature relating to assessment of competence, of the importance either of narrative or of the advisor's role in learning. This also appears to be the case even where the literature is related to assessment situations where there is a clearly specified intention to learn. Assessment of competence is to do with how candidates evidence their experience and is usually concerned with the learning that they are required to demonstrate from a development programme, rather than learning from the actual assessment process itself. Although in the literature the terms student, candidate and learner may be used to describe the same role, in this study I have used the term 'candidate' for consistency. Similarly rather than use a variety of terms covering advisor, mentor, teacher, coach or assessor I will use the term 'advisor' throughout to describe that role.

2.2 Literature Review structure

This chapter will start by considering three key terms in this study: learning, assessment and competence and how these terms are defined and described. It is important to consider what is meant by learning and how this specifically relates to the context of the assessment of competence. I will then consider assessment methods and the process of the assessment of competence. In looking at the development of the term competence I will highlight the continuing debate and discussion around its meaning as well as the role of standards in the assessment process. These definitions and discussions will inform the remainder of the chapter which focuses on the literature concerning the three research questions:

- What is the role of narrative in the assessment of competence?
- What is the role of the advisor in the assessment of competence?
- What learning occurs from the assessment of competence where there is no intention to learn?

2.3 Search process

The literature that is used in this review demonstrates that the assessment of competence has gone on a journey through different areas and locations, from the USA to the UK to Europe and beyond.

Much of the work around assessment of competence dates from the initial use of the terms and the process in the 1980s (Boyatzis, 1982) through its growing use in the vocational education field (Fletcher, 1997; Wolf, 1995) to the use of competencies in organisations' assessment and development centres (Wolf and Silver, 1990) and the most recent research which looks at these issues from different disciplines and from a different nationality's perspective.

The following search terms: 'assessment of competence', 'assessment', 'learning', 'narrative', 'advisor', 'assessor', 'log book', 'portfolio', 'assessment centre', 'development centre', 'assessment of prior learning', 'accreditation of prior learning', 'competence based interview' and 'employability' were used to access the following research resources: Academic Search Complete, JSTOR, Oxford Reference Online, PsycArticles, PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioural Sciences, PubMed, Science Citation Index, Science Direct, Social Sciences Citation Index, United Kingdom Official Publications, Web of Science on Web of Knowledge, WorldCat, and Zetoc . These gave access to a range of education, social science, psychology and behavioural sciences databases to determine the nature and extent of studies relevant to the research questions. The sources were confined to studies published in English and within the last twenty-five years to cover from the start of the competence movement. Studies that were considered came from the USA, Canada, Europe, Africa and Australia. Although the search yielded a great number of results, aspects that were specifically not found related to the role of narrative and the role of the advisor in the assessment of competence process and candidates' learning from that process.

2.4 Learning and the Assessment of Competence

The research questions for this study consider the role of narrative and the advisor in learning from the assessment of competence process. In the context of competence based assessment the emphasis on learning is usually to do with assessing and evidencing what has been learned in relation to the standards that are being assessed. The issue of concern, is what candidates learn as a result of the process rather than what they were explicitly demonstrating they have learned in relation to a set of standards. Also, by choosing a competence based route, candidates specifically do not intend to learn from the process. It is therefore appropriate to look at different models of learning and definitions of knowledge that could relate to learning from having an advisor and writing narratives in relation to a set of standards or competencies.

If learning occurs incidentally from the assessment of competence process the implication is that learning is an outcome of what has happened during that assessment. A candidate has to meet

standards of competence; therefore having an external set of requirements to be met seems to be a relevant factor in this process. In order to demonstrate that they have met these standards, candidates have conversations with their advisor who guides them, through questioning, to appropriate examples from their work. These interactions with an advisor enable candidates to tell the stories of what they have done at work and to be able to describe their experience.

There are no theories of learning that specifically account for the incidental learning that could occur from the advisor's role in the assessment of competence process. A discussion of learning that has some relevance to this assessment process comes from Kolb and Kolb (2005) concerning Enhancing Experiential Learning in Higher Education, where they refer to Experiential Learning Theory as a philosophy of education, based on what Dewey (1938) called '*a theory of experience*'. Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) defines learning as

'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience' (Kolb 1984: 41)

ELT is acknowledged as being based on Vygotsky's (1978) activity theory of social cognition. This definition seems to link the same elements as the assessment of competence whereby an individual's experience or evidence of performance is 'grasped' in order to demonstrate their competence.

Learning that might be realised by candidates as a result of assessment of their competence would be personally significant to each candidate as an individual; where the assessment process enables them to make meaning of their own work experience and relates this to relevant assessment criteria in the standards. In their work around learning conversations, Harri-Augstein & Thomas (1991: 27) have defined learning as the '*construction of personally significant, relevant and viable meaning*'. The concept of learning conversations is further developed in the later section in this chapter on the role of the advisor.

So, although neither of these models specifically refers to the incidental learning from the assessment process itself, it is through the '*grasping and transforming*' of experience and '*learning conversations*' that this type of learning could take place. As such Kolb and Kolb's (2005) and Harri-Augstein & Thomas' (1991) ideas, based as they both are on Vygotskian principles of social constructivism, appear to have significant relevance to learning from the advisory aspect of the assessment process.

In his discussion of implicit learning and tacit knowledge in professional work, Eraut (2000) firstly distinguishes between formal and non-formal learning. The assessment of competence process is close to his characterisation of formal learning in that there is the presence of a designated advisor rather than teacher or trainer; there is a prescribed framework - not of learning but of standards and assessment criteria as the external specification of outcomes; there are organised events in terms of the advisory meetings and assessment although these are not designated as 'learning events'; and there is the award of a qualification.

In relation to non-formal learning he differentiates between implicit learning, reactive learning and deliberative learning. Learning that occurs during an assessment of competence process would not fit neatly into any of these three categories, but could cut across them, as although it occurs in a systematic process of reflection on past actions and events there is no intention to learn. Eraut's conclusions about these non-formal types of learning are drawn from research about respondents' jobs, tasks and duties by asking them about how they acquired the expertise necessary for their jobs and the different sources of their learning. His study was based on interviews with people about implicit learning and tacit knowledge at work. The emphasis was on making explicit the tacit knowledge people have about work, which is learned at work, and refers to aspects such as decision making in tasks. The learning that happens as a result of the competence assessment process has the potential to be more wide ranging than that and would include personal learning leading to previously unrecognised or acknowledged knowledge about self .

Implicit learning is defined by Reber (1993) as:

'the acquisition of knowledge independently of conscious attempts to learn and in the absence of explicit knowledge of what was learned'

With this definition of implicit learning there is clearly no intention to learn and no awareness of learning at the time it takes place. This could refer to the learning that candidates have already done in their workplace whereby they have acquired their propositional and process knowledge of HR - although in many of those situations there is usually an intention to learn. Implicit learning is said to lead to tacit knowledge (Eraut, 2000).

Reactive learning, which lies on a continuum between implicit and deliberative learning, is used to describe situations where the learning is explicit but takes place almost spontaneously in response to recent, current or imminent situations without any time being specifically set aside for it. A difficulty with this form of learning is articulating it into an explicit form would require setting time

aside for more reflection and therefore it would become more like deliberative learning. It is difficult to reconcile this with the assessment of competence process: because advisory sessions take place at specified times this would fit more closely with deliberative learning.

Deliberative learning is defined as occurring in situations specifically set aside for it, and includes a review of past actions with more systematic reflection and implies a planned event with an intention to learn. The interaction between candidate and advisor in the competence assessment process is a planned event, which would imply deliberative learning, and so involves the review of past actions, communications, events or experiences. However, the difference with deliberative learning is that there is an intention to learn.

The focus in Eraut's model is on learning in the workplace rather than learning in an assessment situation. In the workplace there is an implied need and opportunity to learn from work experience – which there is not in the assessment of competence. The process is a reflection on work practice – which makes it more like deliberative learning but with clearly no intention to learn.

Marsick and Watkins' (1990) definitions of informal and incidental learning are also difficult to apply to learning that occurs from competence assessment. Informal learning, as contrasted with formal learning, is described as a category that may occur in institutions but is not typically classroom based or highly structured, and control of learning is primarily in the hands of the learner. It is further defined as learning that is experience based, non-routine and often tacit. The emphasis in their work is on learning at and from work rather than from an assessment process. Informal learning could be deliberately encouraged by the organisation or could take place despite an environment not highly conducive to learning. Applying these characteristics, the competence assessment process is based on candidates' experiences of work, often routine where the knowledge is often tacit. Assessment of competence is however, highly structured and therefore includes elements that could be considered as 'formal' although not designated as 'learning'.

Marsick and Watkins also state that incidental learning almost always takes place in everyday experience although people are not conscious of it. Their definition of incidental learning, as a sub category of informal learning, is seen as a by-product of some other activity such as task accomplishment, trial and error experimentation or even formal learning. In this way, learning from competence assessment could be seen as incidental learning but it happens in a context outside of the organisation. Their description of 'unintended consequences' as the outcome of incidental

learning, is closest to learning from the situation in this study, where there is no intention to learn. The issue is individual's conscious awareness of the degree of their learning. This then brings us back to Eraut's ideas about differentiating types of non-formal learning.

The concepts around non-formal learning, informal learning, incidental learning and unintended consequences have been defined, mostly in relation to learning in and from the workplace rather than in a competence assessment process, but there are some useful elements that can be applied when there is no intention to learn. These include the systematic nature and degree of formality of competence assessment but the lack of intentionality.

For this study a concept is necessary that is useful to describe and analyse the nature of the knowledge that candidates gain, both in their claim for competence and for the tacit knowledge which could become explicit as a result of the assessment process. From a social constructivist perspective, knowledge is the product of social practices. Although this perspective has been criticised for being reductionist (Young, 2008) it can be thought of as useful in terms of how learning occurs. There is an interaction between what is learned and how it is learned. Learning can be conceived as the knowledge that candidates gain, or knowledge that is created, through the experience of the discussion with their advisor about their work experience. Knowledge is deemed to develop internally for candidates through the social collaborative interaction with their advisor.

As well as the social interaction element of learning, there are different types of knowledge that candidates could develop as a result of their assessment of competence. Through reviewing their work experiences, discussing them with their advisor and reframing them in relation to the standards used in the assessment process, candidates could claim knowledge development which relates to the contents of the standards as well as learning that goes beyond the standards. When candidates are identifying and evidencing examples from their own experience to demonstrate competence, they are evidencing their ability and knowledge of how they have done things. It is therefore relevant in terms of assessment of competence to consider *knowledge* as this is an explicit part of the standards and relates to the *learning* that candidates are required to demonstrate. It is also relevant to examine the type of learning that occurs as a result of candidates' assessment of competence. To acknowledge and describe a framework of knowledge would therefore be useful to examine both the learning that candidates should be demonstrating as well as any incidental learning. Eraut (1994) discusses different definitions and concepts of knowledge including Ryle's (1949) terms '*knowing that*' and '*knowing how*'. He concludes that the term **propositional**, can be

likened to '*knowing that*' or the body of information that underpins action. These are the discipline based theories and concepts as well as generalisations and practical principles in the applied field and would concur with the idea of '*knowing about*'. Propositional learning therefore includes elements of both '*knowing that*' and '*knowing about*'. In relation to '*knowing how*' Eraut (1994: 80, 107) has defined **process** knowledge as such, and commented that

*'all professional processes make considerable use of propositional knowledge' and
'process knowledge can be defined as knowing how to conduct the various processes that contribute to professional action, which includes knowing how to access and make use of propositional knowledge'.*

Eraut has used the term **personal** knowledge (1994: 104) and defines it as 'what individual persons bring to situations that enables them to think, interact and perform'. He states that this is the *use* of knowledge and includes personalised versions of codified public knowledge (or propositional knowledge), everyday knowledge of people and situations, skills and practice know-how, memories of cases and episodes, self-knowledge, attitudes and emotions.

Rather than defining the process of learning, these definitions serve to differentiate between types of knowledge that can be referred to in the assessment of competence. In the assessment of their competence, candidates are asked to draw on their propositional knowledge to demonstrate that they '*know about*' aspects of their professional work, and they are asked to demonstrate their process knowledge through evidence that they '*know how*', and through the application of their propositional knowledge. There is very little requirement for them to evidence personal knowledge. These definitions and concepts are developed further in Section 2.6.2. Competence and Standards.

Although Blackler (1995) has described Collins (1993) taxonomy of knowledge to include some similar aspects to propositional knowledge as '*embrained knowledge*' and process knowledge as '*embodied knowledge*', because this is a model of organisational learning it goes beyond a model needed for individual learning. Similarly Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), although their models relate to making tacit knowledge explicit through social collaboration, are not concerned with individual learning but with the management of innovation and knowledge creation in companies.

Neither of the approaches towards knowledge taken by Durkheim (Schmaus, 1994) or Bernstein (2000) as social realists appears to be useful in determining what or how candidates learn. Durkheim's distinctions between orders of meaning as the sacred, as a collective product of society, and the profane, as the practical and immediate, and as a response to the everyday world, are

difficult to relate to the types of learning that candidates could claim, especially as the sacred and profane are always enmeshed to some extent in each other. Bernstein developed Durkheim's approach in a distinction between vertical and horizontal knowledge structures. Horizontal discourses are local, segmented and context bound and vertical discourses are general, explicit and context bound, expressed as hierarchically organised bodies of knowledge organised into specialised languages, e.g. social sciences. The horizontal discourse of on-the-job knowledge is usually gained experientially so could be relevant to competence based assessment. Vertical discourse is contained within codified bodies of knowledge and could relate to the underpinning knowledge required to carry out work practice. However, because (according to Bernstein) there are no explicit principles for transferring meanings across segments (as sites or occupational sectors) it would be difficult to claim competence in relation to set standards. Also, as Bernstein claims that the horizontal discourses cannot generate vertical knowledge and the horizontal or tacit cannot be made explicit, candidates would not be able to demonstrate that their on-the-job experience related to the vertical discourse or body of knowledge that relates to their sector (Young, 2008). Whilst this may apply in pure science contexts, it would not apply in many work contexts where, through shadowing or coaching, someone could develop the ability to carry out a task. This task could have a relevant vertical discourse which becomes explicit through carrying out the task. An example could be a manager being coached to conduct a local and context bound selection interview, through which they appreciate the implications of the Equality Act for the types of information that can be sought for selection purposes.

Eraut (2007: 116) acknowledges a difference between what counts as knowledge in different contexts. In higher professional education knowledge is to a great extent determined by recognised theoretical frameworks, research based evidence, publication and citation and in the workplace by *'what is believed to be feasible and what is believed to achieve desired outcomes at an affordable cost'*. He notes that much working knowledge is embedded in working practices and discourses without even being recognised as knowledge.

As a result of the reflective process of their assessment of competence, candidates' tacit knowledge becomes explicit. To an extent, assessment of competence presupposes that candidates are aware of what they know. *'Tacit knowledge'* describes what we know but cannot tell and there are important distinctions between awareness of tacit knowledge, subjecting it to critical scrutiny and being able to articulate it. One of the best established findings from artificial intelligence, which is of significance here, is that people *'do not know what they know'* (Eraut, 1994: 15). This tacit

knowledge has been described as ordinary practical knowledge characterised by the following factors. There are actions, recognitions and judgements which we know how to carry out spontaneously; we do not have to think about them prior to or during their performance. Also we are often unaware of having learned to do these things; we simply find ourselves doing them and we are usually unable to describe the knowing which our action reveals. These elements are similar to Schon's (1983: 54) '*knowing-in-action*'. It is this process of making tacit knowledge explicit that can occur during the assessment of competence through the advisory conversations where the candidates are enabled to 'grasp and transform' their work experience.

The approach in this piece is to assemble the components that contribute to learning from the assessment of competence as a socially collaborative activity using the description of the three types of knowledge to analyse the learning that occurs, as the current literature does not bring together these elements as a coherent perspective on learning. The following elements are also relevant and brought together in this study: the standards of competence defining the requirements candidates need to meet; the discussion in narratives of these standards in relation to candidates' work experience; the social aspects of collaborative learning; and a framework to analyse the types of learning that candidates can claim result from their assessment of competence. Bringing together social learning theory and a concept of knowledge types can indicate how the role of the advisor is instrumental in creating the environment and opportunities for learning.

Learning in relation to this study can therefore be conceived as a process, the outcome of a process, or as that which has meaning for the candidate. The concern here is with the way in which unintended learning occurs as a result of '*grasping and transforming experience*' through a '*learning conversation*' with an advisor and can include learning in relation to the different types of knowledge defined as propositional, process and personal.

2.5 Assessment and assessment of competence

In order to consider the role of narrative and the role of an advisor in the assessment of competence, the similarities and distinctions between assessments in different contexts needs to be considered. The basic premise of competence based assessment used in this study is summarised by Fletcher (1997: 26):

'it is individual performance which is judged – and judged against explicit standards which reflect ... the expected outcomes of that individual's competent performance.'

The important aspects to consider are those of performance, judgement, standards and what constitutes 'competent' performance.

The term 'assessment' usually refers to the assessment of student learning and traditionally includes exam, essay, coursework, presentation or more recently on-line methods and, in some disciplines, assessment of competence. Literature on assessment concentrates on good practice and guidance on forms of assessment (Eraut, 1994; Heywood, 2000; Knight, 2002), researches current assessment practices, or suggests improvements (Cook, 2001; Maclellan, 2001; Mutch, 2002; Pope, 2001). The emphasis in research is on assessment of learning based on a programme of education and using a variety of forms of assessment. When 'competence' is being assessed as part of an educational programme, there will invariably have been some teaching and learning as part of that programme before the assessment occurs. There are also studies that have considered a range of competence based assessment processes, including work place observation, portfolio and log book building, and most recently e-portfolios. All of this research appears to be in relation to assessment of competence processes that lead either to qualifications through a developmental route or those that explicitly have an intention to learn from the overall process: 'assessment of learning' rather than 'assessment for learning' (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Torrance and Pryor, 2001). This applies in all levels of education as well as in the field of competence based assessment where usually the assessment is part of a programme that is specifically designed to be developmental and the assessment is of that development.

The process of assessment is that needed to make a judgement, where points of comparison are needed and can be implicit or explicit (Black and Wiliam, 1998) and where explicit parameters help to create a shared forum for assessment and transparency of the process. In many assessment processes, particularly those that are an assessment of learning, there is a distinction between formative and summative assessment. In her discussion of the theoretical basis of formative and summative assessment Taras (2005: 467) gave a definition of assessment as

'a judgement which can be justified according to specific weighted set goals yielding either comparative or numerical rating.'

where it is necessary to justify the data gathering instruments or criteria, the weightings, the selection of goals and the judgement against the stated goals and criteria. In the assessment of competence there is a process that is similar in many ways, of advice being given to the candidate about the standards and assessment requirements. This can be seen in the criteria that Taras (2005) advocates, and which is similar to Sadler's (1998) formative feedback. Taras (2005:471) argues a role

for feedback within the assessment process using Ramaprasad's (1983: 4) definition of formative feedback as:

'information about the gap between the actual level and the reference level of a system parameter which is used to alter the gap in some way'

For Sadler (1989: 142), student improvement requires the capacity to monitor the quality of the students' own work during its production where 'feedback' requires

'knowledge of the standard or goal, skills in making multi-criterion comparisons, and the development of ways and means for reducing the discrepancy between what is produced and what is aimed for'

Therefore formative feedback is targeted feedback to improve learning efficiently and expediently (Sadler 1989: 120). In many traditional educational settings, it is the teacher who is part of both the formative and summative processes of assessment where the teacher is the 'agent' doing something to the learner. Taras (2005) acknowledges that the work of Black and Wiliam (1998) and Torrance and Pryor (2001) have both been beneficial in promoting aspects of assessment and learning: discussing and understanding criteria and providing feedback to learners on which they reflect. Taras adds a further aspect to the steps for formative and summative assessment – that of justifying the judgement in terms of goals and criteria. In a competence based assessment process, and in the assessment of competence, there is not the same distinction between formative and summative assessment but rather there is a process of advice being given to the candidate about the standards and assessment requirements as part of the process, against the criteria that Taras (2005) advocates, and which is similar to Sadler's (1998) formative feedback. There is still the suggestion in their work on feedback that the assessment of competence is part of an intentionally developmental process.

According to Fletcher (1997), the purpose of assessment in a competence based assessment system is:

'to collect sufficient evidence that individuals can perform or behave to the specified standards in a specific role. If this assessment is also linked to an award system, a further purpose is formal recognition of successful performance'

This concurs with Taras's (2005) definition of assessment, in that both are concerned with making judgements and using evidence against criteria. Wolf (1995) was critical of traditional academic and assignment based assessments claiming that competence based assessments are more transparent. Competence based awards attempt to make the criteria (or competence) completely explicit and create systems that are transparent, 'rationally' justified by careful analysis and proof against the fallibility of trainers and assessors.

To consider this further, there is an area of the assessment of competence that relates to the development of professional knowledge and competence as opposed to purely vocational qualifications. Eraut (1994) noted that for many, in order to become a member of a professional body, there is a requirement for an academic qualification which is then supplemented with a log book or portfolio to demonstrate the application of the knowledge gained in the academic arena. Competence as a professional is not complete until this is 'signed off' by an assessor. Many professional memberships differ from professional qualifications and to gain full membership many professional bodies require that entry qualifications are supplemented by a period of relevant experience which is frequently described in terms of content, level and duration. Professional qualifications may not evidence full occupational competence but are taken as evidence that individuals have the knowledge and skills that will enable them to develop competence rather than evidence that they possess competence. This competence will then be demonstrated with evidence and examples presented in a log book or portfolio. This is similar to the assessment of competence as evidenced in this study where the portfolio contains the candidates' narratives. The use of a log book is discussed in relation to competence and as a form of narrative in a later section in this chapter (2.6.2 Competence and Standards).

It is not just in the UK that assessment of competence has applied: in the Netherlands Dijksterhuis et al (2009) have noted that there is still a gradual move from a 'master-apprentice' training to a competency based, outcome focused post-graduate education system. Govaerts et al (2007) also recognise the need to change the focus of assessment from measurement of the outcome of an educational activity, to assessment as an integral part of education, and to change to an assessment of role competence rather than trait. Focusing on the context of performance assessment may be more effective in improving practices and taking a constructivist approach towards assessment has significant implications for assessment procedures as well as the evaluation of assessment quality. And, although all of these studies were looking at the process of assessment and competence, their focus was on the need for assessment within HE studies to be outcome and competence based. Here it would seem that some aspects of vocational development and qualifications are ahead of Higher Education in realising a need for the assessment of competence.

The issues surrounding assessment are complex and include discussions around formative and summative assessment, methods of assessment, and the role of feedback to candidates. Assessment is usually concerned with assessing learning rather than considering the learning that occurs from the actual process of assessment, particularly the assessment of competence and specifically where

there is no intention to learn. For this study, assessment of competence will be conceived as the judgement of an individual's performance by comparing that performance against specified assessment criteria, which can include a process similar to formative assessment through providing feedback to candidates at the advisory stage in relation to the judgement of their work and becomes summative at the point of assessment.

2.6 Competence

Standards, or assessment criteria, are crucial to the assessment of competence process. To be able to consider the nature of learning that candidates are expected to demonstrate, as well as the learning that they may evidence as a result of their assessment process, it is necessary to consider the development of the concept of 'competence' and how this impacts on candidates' assessment and learning. This definition is also important to be able to recognise similarities and differences between the assessment of learning and the assessment of competence.

Exploration of the literature shows that there is an abundance of work that examines the nature and definition of competence (Boyatzis, 1982; Fletcher, 1997; Jessup, 1992; Barnett, 1994; Hogg, 2007; Hyland, 1994; Page et al 2005) as this has an impact on the nature of what candidates are expected to learn, the way in which competence is assessed and the consequent nature of the evidence that is relevant and required. This literature does not explicitly consider aspects of narrative and learning related to competence, although it is still relevant to consider the concept of competence as it is fundamental to the assessment process.

2.6.1 The definition of competence

Definitions and descriptions of competence tend to emphasise aspects of performance which can be learned, the ability to assess that performance and therefore the learning. The literature on competence emphasises the definition of the concept of competence primarily, then how the individual gains that competence rather than acknowledgement of the role of narrative or listeners in that development, or of the role of tacit learning that could occur.

As this study is based on an assessment of competence process it is useful to consider what exactly is meant by 'competence'. It is acknowledged that this term is still being defined and has been debated considerably since the work of Boyatzis (1982). National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) brought the term to wider attention in the UK, and it has been seen in a number of different ways that will be discussed here: some of which are just about how competence is defined, others are

about where or how competence is demonstrated, whilst others differentiate between competence and performance.

In 1995 Wolf traced the emergence of ‘*competence based assessment*’ and noted then that the concept of competence had been defined in a range of ways and that not all of them were related to the idea of competence based assessment. The most appropriate definition was that proposed by the Employment Department in 1991 and as such is the definition that is used within this study:

‘competence describes what can be done; an action, behaviour or outcome which a person should be able to demonstrate’

Boyatzis (1982) defined competence as broadly an ‘*underlying characteristic of a person*’ which could be a ‘*motive, trait, skill, aspect of one’s self-image or social role, or a body of knowledge which he or she uses*’. This definition seems to be all encompassing and has led to organisations developing lists of competences that include behaviours which may be a helpful distinction for advisors but may become a very long list of unattainable or inappropriate aspirations for others. All further definitions relate competence to a specified or implied learning process that either explicitly or implicitly includes the **assessment** of competence as part of the definition. A useful distinction, proposed by Woodruffe (2007) is between competence as an ability to do something and competency as the set of behaviours that the person must display in order to perform the tasks and functions of their job with competence. For this study the term competence would be the appropriate term as this refers to **process knowledge**, whereas competency would refer to some aspects of **personal knowledge**. Personal knowledge could extend beyond the behaviours needed for competence.

Fletcher (1997: 4) identified the debates on competence systems at that time as being:

Criterion referenced	vs.	criterion validated
Outcome based	vs.	behavioural
Outcome related	vs.	input related
Competences	vs.	competencies
Competence	vs.	competency

Fletcher (1997: 4) argued that, rather than debates around terminology, the real issues should be ‘*What do we want to assess?*’ and ‘*Why do we want to assess?*’ Both of these questions are important but she does, however, omit another important question, ‘*How should we assess?*’ which is important from the point of view of the assessment of competence because it has implications for

the role of advisor and narrative in this process. She further stated that occupational competence reflects *performance* at work and her definition of the purpose of competence based assessment is:

'To collect sufficient evidence of workplace performance to demonstrate that individuals can perform or behave to the specified standards required within a specified occupational role'

She acknowledged that CBET (Competence Based Education and Training) had its roots in teacher education in the USA and that the US Office of Education's model programmes for school teachers included *'the precise specification of competences or behaviours to be learned'* with the indication that competencies can be learned and that the assessment process would be of that learning. The emphasis in many of these descriptions is that competence, behaviours or performance can be learned and evidenced and therefore assessed. There is no acknowledgement that the actual process of candidates demonstrating or describing their competence would itself be developmental.

Competence is seen by some as only part of the way along a continuum that leads from novice to expert: Hyland (1994) described four progressive levels based around the Dreyfus & Dreyfus (1986) model of skills acquisition:

1. from novice – advanced beginner
2. from advanced beginner – competent
3. from competent – proficient
4. from proficiency – expertise

The implication is that this is a developmental process and that there is a possibility to progress from novice to expert. This definition also implies that *'competent'* is not yet good enough but is on the way towards it, and contrasts with other definitions which indicate that *'competent'* is the requirement to be achieved, for example Fletcher (1997: 46) where she describes the *'competent individual'* as someone who can perform:

- To the specified standards
- Consistently
- Over a range of contexts or conditions

As Jessup (1992: 20) asserts that rather than competence as a *'lowish or minimal level of performance...'* it refers to the standards required successfully to perform an activity or function. Being competent means performing to professional or occupational standards. In most professional and occupational areas there is no scope for *'second best'* standards. By this he implies that competence is an absolute rather than a stage in a developmental process. The defined requirement when assessing competence is that the candidate can demonstrate that their evidence is valid and addresses the area of competence defined; it is authentic and is their own evidence; it is current and

within the previous two years; and that there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate competence (usually shown on at least two occasions of the same event or through two different examples) (QCA, 2006).

More recent work in the medical field has continued this debate taking it further into different professional fields, sometimes revisiting previous discussions but also extending these. For example, where Wass et al (2001) have considered tests of clinical competence, they defined the assessment of competence as different from assessment of performance. Similarly in their adaptation of the Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCE) from use in clinical situations to social work, Bogo et al (2011: 7) have argued that if you accept their definition of professional competence as *'a set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes or values that are evident in the behavior of professionals as they perform in the domains associated with their profession'* then as the tool used for this assessment is based on a view of professional competence that defines complex procedures in discrete, concrete, and observable behaviours it is insufficient for a social work assessment. Interestingly they advocated the inclusion of a 'post encounter' guided reflection with the examiner who had just observed the interaction, which is similar to the role of the advisor in the assessment of competence in that it would enable the candidate to reflect on and tell their narrative version of the event. Neither of these studies acknowledged this role as mediating the candidates' learning and both were in situations where there was an intention to learn.

This study is concerned with the relationship between competence as a concept, the assessment of competence, the role of narrative and the advisor in the assessment process and how candidates learn from that process. The implication in all of the definitions of competence is of the candidate performing at a standard; in order to demonstrate their competence they have to be able to do what is expected or to be able to evidence that they have done what is expected. The definition of that expectation is through a set of assessment criteria or standards.

2.6.2 Competence and standards

Standards or assessment criteria are therefore important in the assessment of competence, and the demonstration of these standards in this study is through a narrative process where candidates evidence and describe what they have done at work that meets these standards. Standards have a crucial role not only in the assessment of competence but in other assessments and situations, where there is a role for an advisor working with a candidate, discussing their work in relation to a set of standards. Standards represent the performance and knowledge that candidates should be

demonstrating in terms of their competence, and encompass propositional, process and personal descriptors of knowledge.

Competence based assessment is based on the premise of criterion referencing rather than norm referencing, so in order to be effective the standards themselves must be robust and relevant. The three components of competence based assessment were outlined by Wolf (1995) as:

- 1 the emphasis on outcomes – specifically multiple outcomes, each distinctive and separately considered
- 2 the belief that these can and should be specified to the point where they are clear and transparent – that third parties should be able to understand what is being assessed and what should be achieved
- 3 the decoupling of assessment from particular institutions or learning programmes

Eraut (1994: 6) commented that professions have employed several methods of training and preparation, often in combination and that for any profession these will include:

- *a qualifying examination normally set by a qualifying association for the occupation*
- *a period of relevant study, leading to a recognised academic qualification*
- *the collection of evidence of practical competence in the form of a logbook or portfolio*

He also states that each of these methods makes a 'distinctive contribution to the student's knowledge base'. The logbook or portfolio he refers to is usually a developmental process where students work through a number of levels or units in progression, and in combination with associated study, so there is a very obvious link between learning and the assessment of competence in a portfolio. Students who are working on an Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) route (also known in South Africa and Australia as Recognition of Prior Learning or RPL, in USA as prior learning assessment or PLA and in Canada as prior learning assessment and recognition PLAR) or who are seeking to obtain a qualification or recognition solely through an assessment of competence route, differ from Eraut's concept in that, rather than evidencing competence as they achieve it as part of their development, they are looking back at their work experience and identifying when and how they have met the set of standards or criteria: they produce a portfolio of evidence that demonstrates their competence. Fletcher (1997) described the APL process as a useful tool for motivating staff as well as providing the opportunity for credits being recorded for prior learning achievements and that this would recognise that many people gain competence 'on-the-job', in work- related activities and through independent or self- directed study. However, there is no recognition in this form of assessment of the extent to which candidates also 'learn' or further

contribute to their knowledge base as an outcome of the actual activity of comparing their experience against a set of standards, collecting evidence and explaining how the evidence meets the standards. As Young (2008: 123) also points out, in relation to the outcomes specified in NVQs that for beginning learners:

'pre-specification of outcomes... may actually be an advantage in helping them to establish achievable goals and develop a confidence in their own capacities. On the other hand, detailed pre-specification of outcomes... downgrades both the knowledge that may be required for but not expressed in competent performance and the role and professional judgement of teachers and trainers as assessors of student or trainee learning. It also under-emphasises the forms of tacit learning that cannot be expressed in terms of outcomes but which learners, especially low level learners, will need if they are going to progress'

This statement is contained within a discussion about the role of qualifications in educational reform where the focus is on beginner and 'low-level' learners. A different view to this would be that beginning and mature learners and at any level have the potential for learning beyond the scope of any written description of standards or learning outcomes. Candidates need not be, and are not, constrained by the standards they are expected to meet to demonstrate their competence.

In relation to learning from experience in general *'in spite of its popular appeal, there is much less evidence available about precisely what is learned from experience and how'* (Eraut, 1994: 13). This study sets out to examine that gap and to look at what is learned from experience through the narrative processes both spoken and written.

It is important to remember the concept on which the development of the standards has been based: standards reflect the expectations or outcome of workplace performance. It has long been acknowledged that assessing performance or competence needs to be supplemented with assessments of knowledge and understanding with the importance of this likely to be greater at higher levels (NCVQ, 1991) and that within a competence based model of qualifications there is no justification for assessing knowledge for its own sake but only for its contribution to competent performance (Jessup, 1991). The structure of standards used in the assessment of competence has developed and there tends to be a separation within assessment between the performance/outcomes and the underpinning knowledge needed to perform competently. Jessup (1991: 16) argued that:

'knowledge is required, in the context of practising an occupation or profession, not as an end in itself, but to ensure competent performance'

This concept of knowledge is similar to the previously discussed concept of **propositional knowledge**.

More recently National Occupational Standards, and also organisational competences, have included another element called 'behaviours' which are described, unhelpfully, as *'behaviours displayed by individuals who work to the required standard'* (Management Standards Centre, 2008). The CIPD (2011) HR Profession Map includes Behaviours that describe in detail how an HR professional needs to carry out their duties. This is an interpretation that can be applied to this idea of **personal knowledge** as being how an individual carries out what they do but can also include what they know about themselves that may not only affect what they do but also affect how they do it.

Whilst it may be that *'qualifications defined within an outcomes based framework disregard learning that might be important and valid for the learner but is not specifiable in advance or indeed may not be very specifiable at all except in very general terms'* (Young, 2008: 122) what is important is that the standards do express 'competence' in terms of the definition *'competence describes what can be done; an action, behaviour or outcome which a person should be able to demonstrate'* (Employment Department, 1991)

From this discussion of the definition of competence and standards it is apparent that the three descriptions of knowledge as:

- **Propositional knowledge** – the body of knowledge that underpins performance
- **Process knowledge** – the way in which things are done
- **Personal knowledge** – knowledge about self that affects performance

contribute to the concept of competence and all three have a place in the assessment of competence. They will also help to determine the knowledge that candidates are expected to demonstrate and the type of knowledge that they gain that goes beyond the standards.

2.7 Research issues

Having considered the three aspects of learning, assessment and competence, this chapter now continues by examining the three research issues.

2.7.1 The role of narrative in the assessment of competence

The specific role of narrative, as the enabler of candidates' re-engagement with their experience, is not widely acknowledged in the literature concerning the assessment of competence. As was noted

in Section 2.4 Learning and assessment of competence: '*Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience*' (Kolb, 1984: 41). This is inherent in the process of writing their narrative of work experience. Candidates are writing the story of what they have done at work, in relation to the standards, in order to claim competence.

Within the relationship of assessment and learning, my interest developed to the potential for the role of narrative as depicted in the literature as 'storytelling'. In this study looking at the assessment of competence it seemed appropriate to consider that the recounting of experiences could be described as 'story telling' or narrative. This recounting occurs in the candidates' written storyboards and in their discussions with their advisor.

The role of storytelling has been established in other aspects of learning: the use of stories and storytelling has grown and developed beyond the fields of literature and linguistics to become a source of data in a range of disciplines and professions. This is evident in publications related to disciplines such as history (White, 1981), anthropology and folklore (Behar, 1993), psychology (Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988); sociology (Boje, 1991), and sociolinguistics (Labov, 1982; Polanyi, 1985). Professions have also utilised narrative and storytelling: law (Bruner, 2002), medicine (Hunter, 1991), nursing (Ironside, 2003), and education (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) and it has become popularised in areas as diverse as leadership (Denning, 2004), the management of change (Denning, 2008; Brown et al, 2009) and informal learning (Orr, 1996; Brown & Duguid, 2000).

Using Genette's (1988) ideas it is possible to distinguish between story, narrating and the narrative itself (in a non-fictional, historical context) where, in the assessment of competence, *story* is the actual order (the completed events) which would be the candidate's experience, *narrating* (the narrative act of the historian) which would be the candidate/advisor discussion, and *narrative* (the product of that act) as a written text, a recording or surviving in human memory which is the candidate's written storyboards. There are two relevant aspects here: *narrating* as the act of discussion; and *narrative* as the written storyboard. So when looking at the role of narrative in the assessment of competence I am just considering the candidate's written storyboards.

In the assessment of their competence, candidates will be demonstrating a characteristic of narrative: they are providing a temporal framework. They are describing their '*chronology with causality*' and by implication according to Brophy (2009: 33) their lesson learned. In narrative, by linking a chain of events through cause and effect, candidates provide a starting point or beginning,

followed by a middle and finally an end. Traditionally every story begins 'Once upon a time...' then progresses to what happened, to whom, where and when, and then an end: what was the result. There is '*chronology coupled with causality*'. Also by implication, Brophy considers that a further result is the lesson to be learned from what has been told and as such it is '*one way of depicting reality and of revealing the meaning beneath the surface of events, of "telling it as it is" '.*

Spielhofer (2001) made one of the few contributions that, when researching literature relating to the role of narrative in learning and assessment, seemed to have relevance if only from the title 'Writing stories, telling tales'. In his study of the implementation of NVQs in banks, Spielhofer (2001) found that candidates were expected to write case studies of what they had experienced, supported with evidence, to meet the NVQ standards. They conceptualised the process as '*writing stories*' about routine tasks in order to accredit existing skills which is similar to the assessment of competence using a portfolio of experience. There was some evidence that candidates gained a transferable qualification and learned from this overall process which they expressed in the following ways:

- Improved confidence by recognising what skills they had
- Increased confidence to gain a qualification
- Improved work practices through reflection on the NVQ requirements

At the time when Spielhofer (2001) did his study he found that although there was research into how NVQs had been implemented into the workplace from an employer's perspective, it was apparent that there was little academic research at that time which looked at the process from the candidates' perspective, and that the studies there were tended to give a broad picture across industries and levels. Although Spielhofer (2001) did not comment on the quality and quantity of research and literature around the role of narrative and the advisor in the assessment of competence, I have found that there is a lack of emphasis in research on this aspect compared to other factors such as the definition of 'competence'.

Continuing the ideas around narrative, and in his development of Vygotsky's (1978) concepts of social learning, Bruner (1991) has further argued that the mind structures its sense of reality using mediation through '*cultural products, like language and other symbolic systems*' and he specifically focused on the idea of narrative as one of these cultural products. He defined narrative in terms of ten aspects. Firstly, the role of '*narrative diachronicity*' in the assessment of competence is that the narrative takes place over some sense of time – which is Brophy's beginning, middle and end. They

are also a selected series of experiences that constitute a "story" – '*hermeneutic composability*'. Related to hermeneutic composability, is the characteristic of '*context sensitivity and negotiability*', where narrative requires a negotiated role within a context. Narratives deal with particular events, i.e. those from the candidate's experience, which gives them '*particularity*', as well being about '*canonicity and breach*' where something unusual happening that "breaches" the canonical (i.e. normal) state which could be identified as a critical incident. Following on from '*canonicity and breach*', narrative '*normativeness*' in some way supposes a claim about how one ought to act. Candidates display '*intentional state entailment*' in terms of their individual beliefs, desires, theories, values which may be evident in their **personal** knowledge. Stories in some way reference reality, although not in a direct way; narrative truth can offer verisimilitude but not verifiability through this '*referentiality*'. '*Genericness*' as a characteristic means that a narrative can be classified as a genre. '*Narrative accrual*' means that candidates' narratives are cumulative: new stories follow from older ones.

Bruner observed that these ten characteristics at once describe narrative and the reality constructed and posited by narrative, which in turn teaches us about the nature of reality as constructed by the human mind via narrative. It is through the interactive process of these ten aspects that candidates use narrative as social learning. This aspect is developed in the section 2.7.2 The role of the advisor in the assessment of competence.

2.7.1.1 Portfolios as narrative assessment methods in the assessment of competence

When considering the role of narrative in the assessment of competence, it is worth acknowledging the role of specific assessment methods, particularly log books or portfolios, as a narrative method. The emphasis in recent research has been on the evaluation and implementation of certain methods of assessment and the focus has been on portfolios or log books and e-portfolios.

As Goldsmith (2007) recognised '*portfolios are more than just giant files*' where all portfolios, paper based or electronic, generally share three basic characteristics that allow them to be used as an assessment tool:

- a collection of materials created for a variety of reasons over time
- an organised selection of materials
- additional information and content including introductions and reflection.

As an assessment tool, the portfolio can be thought of as a narrative as it tells the story of the candidates' experience. The 'introductions and reflections' Goldsmith describes are just a small part

of the narrative that can be produced when a candidate has to describe what experience they have that is relevant to the assessment criteria and use evidence of their experience to support their narrative.

The research in literature focuses on log books or portfolios where there is a tendency for this to be to about the following: validity of assessment ratings of portfolios (Driessen et al, 2006; Driessen et al, 2007); components of a portfolio (Wilkinson et al, 2002); students' perceptions of the portfolio process (Davis et al, 2009); and in relation to e-portfolios has been to do with content management and the usefulness of portfolios in assessing student learning and aiding curricular development (Fitch et al, 2008). None of these address the idea of narrative as such within the portfolio development process.

The research in South Africa in relation to RPL is based on the idea that Kolb's (1984) experiential learning can not only be the equivalent of academic learning but can also empower candidates to find knowledge in what they already do and to understand it in an academic way (Shalem and Steinberg, 2006). Their work focused on using RPL as a portfolio based route for recognising the informal learning of historically disadvantaged adult learners. They acknowledged the insights that learners gain from reflecting on their experience but question the success of the process as socialisation into a field of knowledge.

For assessment of competence candidates this process of portfolio creation is about how they select what is appropriate evidence from their work that will meet the standards. Goldsmith (2007) argues that creating a portfolio requires students to select from the work they have produced and organise the materials for a specific purpose. Through prompts for reflections and introductions, students can be encouraged to re-engage with their work in a meaningful way. It is this continual meaningful re-engagement, as students create and recreate their portfolios, which both enhances the learning process and allows portfolios to be used for authentic assessment. Goldsmith's emphasis in her work is about the role and advantage of an electronic portfolio rather than the role of narrative writing or storytelling in producing the portfolio although the process of re-engagement is relevant.

Portfolio building can be seen therefore as employing narrative processes where candidates are organising evidence of their experience to supplement their written narratives, which will evidence their competence in relation to the assessment criteria.

2.7.2 The role of the advisor in the assessment of competence

It is interesting to note that in the early days of competence assessment CNAAB and BTEC (1990) found indications in their Assessment of Management Competences Project that ‘the role of the mentor has not been given sufficient attention’. This may have been the case then, and in much of the literature and subsequent research around the assessment of competence the focus continues to be on other aspects of the process such as the criteria for assessment rather than the role of an advisor.

Although their work relates to designing learning in Higher Education, McDrury and Alterio (2002) are one of the few exceptions to this where they have considered the role of ‘listeners’ as crucial. In the five stages of their storytelling model, listeners are vital for learning. Specifically they emphasise the importance of the listener engaging with the teller using *response discourse*, where they remain focused on the original story, rather than *response story*, where the listener reacts by telling their own story. When one listener and one teller have a dialogue on the teller’s story content in a formal setting designed to facilitate reflective learning, they are more likely to uncover layers of meaning which focus on the teller’s perspective but where the listener adds an extra dimension.

McDrury and Alterio’s (2002: 47) model of Reflective learning through storytelling (Figure 1 from McDrury and Alterio, 2002: 60) has been compared to Moon’s (1999) Map of Learning (Table 1 Links between Learning and Storytelling) and incorporates Entwistle’s (1996) work on deep and surface approaches to learning. This is a model that they have used with students to facilitate learning and develop professional practice. They believe that learning processes that promote dialogue are central to effective storytelling approaches, as are meaning making and reflective processes.

Map of learning (Moon, 1999)	Learning through storytelling
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Noticing• Making sense• Making meaning• Working with meaning• Transformative learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Story finding• Story telling• Story expanding• Story processing• Story reconstructing

Table 1 Links between Learning and Storytelling (from McDrury and Alterio, 2002: 47)

‘Noticing’ and ‘story finding’ do not mean that learning will occur because at this stage candidates are operating at a surface level. At the ‘making sense’ and ‘story telling’ stage, McDrury and Alterio

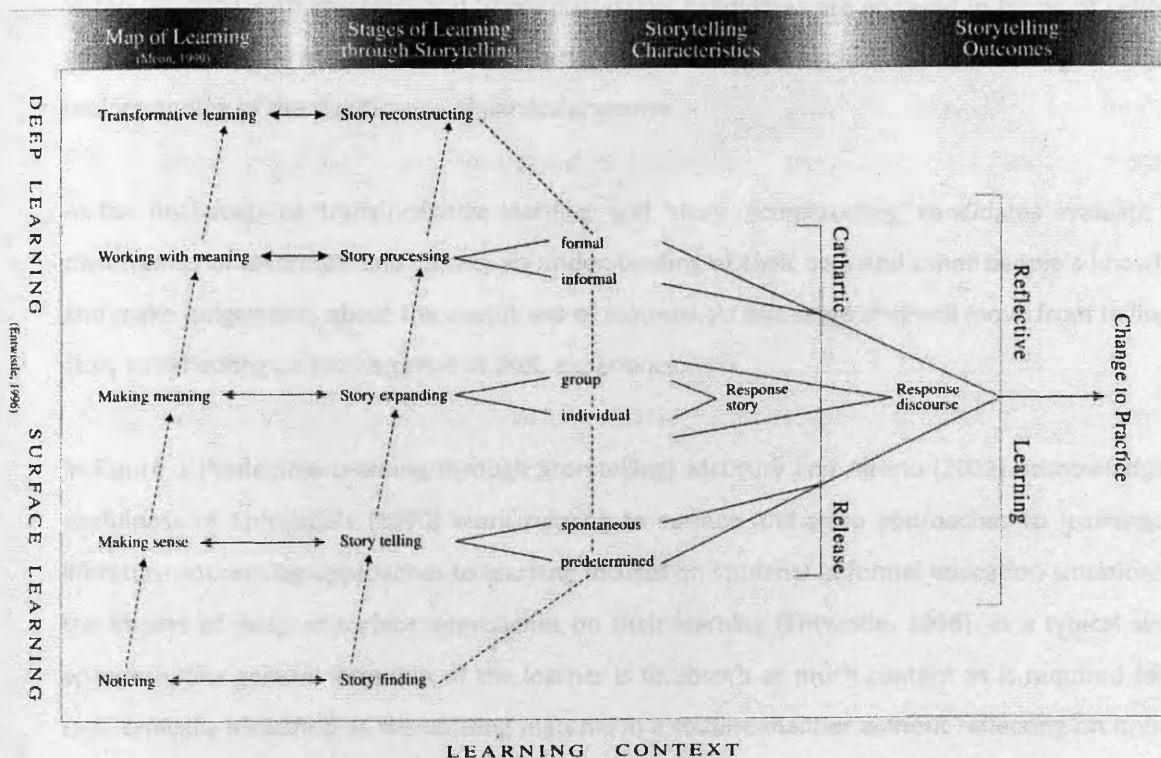


Figure 1 Reflective learning through storytelling

(2002) consider that candidates are concerned with organising and ordering their content and that stories are told and listened to for the purpose of understanding the story itself. At these stages the candidates will be sharing the stories of their experiences with their advisor. During 'making meaning' and 'story expanding', the advisor asks the question 'why' in order to make reasoned connections, which marks a shift from a surface to deep approach to learning. It is at this stage that both tellers and listeners who are reflectively and actively involved in this process will assimilate new learning into their cognitive structures (schema) which concurrently accommodate it and enable further links to be made.

When 'working with meaning' and 'story processing' candidates are engaged in forms of reflection where the listeners engage tellers in reflective questioning to explore issues resulting in a deeper understanding of the significance of particular stories.

At the final stage of 'transformative learning' and 'story reconstructing' candidates evaluate their own frames of reference and convey an understanding of their own and other people's knowledge and make judgements about the usefulness of material. At this stage they will move from telling the story to reflecting on the narrative of their experience.

In Figure 1 (Reflective Learning through Storytelling) McDrury and Alterio (2002) acknowledge the usefulness of Entwistle's (1996) work relating to surface and deep approaches to learning. The literature concerning approaches to learning focuses on students in formal education situations and the impact of deep or surface approaches on their learning (Entwistle, 1996). In a typical surface approach, the general intention of the learner is to absorb as much content as is required for the task, typically identified as memorising material in a routine manner without reflecting on it, or the underpinning purposes or structure of it, or relating it to previous learning or knowledge. It is seen as learning without reflecting on either purpose or strategy (Moon, 1999): a consequence of which may be superficial learning. In contrast, a deep approach to learning is characterised by an intention in the learner to understand the material, seeking meaning, and understanding the ideas in it.

The competence assessment situation in this study does not involve candidates in explicit learning; rather there is no intention to learn, so a surface or deep approach may seem an inappropriate description. However, the activities candidates participate in with their advisor could be seen as, and have effects, similar to a deep approach to learning. Candidates need to understand the material of the standards and competence criteria, and with the assistance of their advisor, they seek meaning

and understanding of how their work meets the criteria. A deep approach is driven by the intention to understand ideas by relating them to previous knowledge and experience, looking for patterns and underlying principles, and checking evidence and relating it to conclusions. So the expressions used to describe the deep approach, 'to understand ideas by relating them to previous knowledge and experience' and 'checking evidence and relating it to conclusions' seem to indicate the reflective activity undertaken by candidates with their advisors.

Moon's (1999) stage of 'transformative learning', which McDrury and Alterio have linked to 'story reconstructing,' is characterised by learners' capacity to take a critical overview of knowledge and their own knowledge and functioning in relation to it. Moon (1999: 146) notes that, similar to the role of an advisor:

'a mentor who can facilitate the process of learning to this stage may be effective in supporting a learner in developing their capacities to this stage with regard to a particular element of learning'

She goes on to illustrate the stage of transformative learning with learners' comments:

'what my tutor said has helped me to look at it in a completely new light'

'I can see that my view was biased in the past. Now I am reconsidering the situation'

which demonstrate the learner's capacity to take a critical overview of their knowledge and performance. Although candidates are not intending to learn from the assessment of their competence, they could, with the support of their advisor move through the stages of Moon's (1999) Map of Learning, McDrury and Alterio's (2002) Stages of Learning through Storytelling and from a surface to a deep approach to learning.

The level of understanding and ability to make judgements described at the stage of 'transformative learning' and 'story reconstructing' is similar to the definitions of 'critical thinking' as the '*purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based*' (Facione, 1990: 3).

McDrury and Alterio acknowledge that their storytelling approach has allegiances with Vygotskian perspectives because they view learning as a social and collaborative process, one which values candidates' prior experience. From a Vygotskian social constructivist perspective, knowledge is thought to develop internally in a process driven by social interaction with the outside world (Wertsch, 1985). From this perspective it is the social context which is important and which brings

about knowledge development within individuals. Vygotsky emphasised the importance of language and dialogue, the social contexts of learning in the construction of knowledge and the candidates' unassisted and assisted capabilities by acknowledging their 'zone of proximal development' and the role of the 'more knowledgeable other'. He also recognised the role of '*culturally situated learning, believing that educational interactions reflect the surrounding culture*' (Arlidge, 2000: 37).

Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory draws on Vygotsky's (1978) activity theory of social cognition with learning as a transaction between the person and the social environment. Kolb and Kolb (2005) argue in higher education for the need to make space for Conversational Learning which is exactly what McDrury and Alterio have developed in their model of reflective learning through storytelling.

The act of reflection is not necessarily one that comes naturally, often because there is little space or opportunity for it given the pace and demands of the workplace (Raelin, 2002). Most people need to be trained to reflect as a learning process (Ollila, 2000; Bolton, 2010) and can be encouraged and assisted by the support of advisors or facilitators (Boud et al, 1985; Marsick and Watkins, 1997) '*to help learners reframe their knowledge base*' (Raelin, 2002: 135). If this applies to explicit development activities where candidates are taught how to reflect to facilitate their learning, and similar reflective processes occur in other activities, such as the reflection and storytelling aspects of the assessment of competence, then it should follow that learning would take place as a result of those experiences. '*Deep learning is associated with reflective activity*' (McDrury and Alterio, 2002: 48) where through reflective dialogue multiple perspectives of events can be developed: reflective dialogue acknowledges the role of the listener in this process and the ways in which they engage tellers through reflective questioning can influence what the tellers choose to tell.

The process of narrative and dialogue can facilitate the kind of reflecting that is often difficult to do. In relation to those ordinary, tacit constructs that guide practice in the workplace, candidates may not be able to present their practical theories as propositional knowledge - but they can always tell their stories to others about what they have done and what has happened as a result. Storytelling, as a reflective tool (Gray, 2007), can be described as a collective act, where the story needs to be told to someone else, so it encourages us to share meanings as these must be made explicit for the story to be understood. Storytelling has been portrayed as an important management skill, and Boje (1991) and Gold et al (2002) have examined how stories also help managers to articulate their accounts of quite complex events in which they are immersed.

Harri-Augstein & Thomas (1991: 104) developed ideas, similar to those of Pask (1975), which describe such a learning tool as a '*learning conversation*', where learning occurs through '*conversations*' between the learner and another agent. In this study these are the conversations where the candidates are telling the stories of their work experience. The advisor creates the '*conversational space*' and the candidate and advisor become the '*conversational entity*' where the two person system as a whole takes on characteristics which were not inherent in its separate entities. These two entities can temporarily synchronise becoming one and create the '*learning conversation*' where the learner comes to know, or to construct, a shared understanding of the world through the ability to externalise and express it conceptually through engagement with others.

McDrury and Alterio (2002: 38) suggest that the key to learning through storytelling is allowing meaning to develop through reflective dialogue because when we tell stories and process them using reflective dialogue we can learn from that discussion with others who may '*raise alternative views, suggest imaginative possibilities and ask stimulating questions*'. Reflective tools have the capability to be used in collaboration (Gray, 2007), and can work most effectively, with a workshop facilitator, coach or mentor given that managers have a lack of space or opportunity to reflect at work.

The advisor's role in the assessment of competence is sometimes compared with that of a coach or mentor. It can be difficult to distinguish between coaching and mentoring where '*mentoring*' for example is sometimes used interchangeably with '*coaching*'. There is some difference of opinion, and no ready agreement, about what exactly coaching is, and how it differs from other '*helping behaviours*' such as counselling and mentoring. Broadly speaking, the CIPD (2011) defines coaching as developing a person's skills and knowledge so that their job performance improves, hopefully leading to the achievement of organisational objectives. It targets high performance and improvement at work, although it may also have an impact on an individual's private life. It usually lasts for a short period and focuses on specific skills and goals. From this definition, coaching and advising and assessing competence are quite different. Assessment of competence in this study is not about improving job performance, has no direct relationship to achieving organisational objectives and does not focus on specific goals and skills unless this is interpreted as the skills used to generate the work products and the goals to achieve the qualification. Traditionally, however, mentoring in the workplace has tended to describe a relationship in which a more experienced

colleague used their greater knowledge and understanding of the work or workplace to support the development of a more junior or inexperienced member of staff (CIPD, 2011). The advisor in a competence assessment relationship could be considered similar to a mentor in that they have experience of the standards and would have an understanding or overview of the work of the individual being assessed.

In a process similar to coaching and mentoring, Kicken et al (2009) found in their experimental study of the development of self directed learning skills in secondary vocational studies (where the intention was not only to learn but to learn how to learn) that when advice was given rather than just feedback the students appreciated the meetings more and perceived the meetings to be more effective. This is one of the few mentions of the role of an advisor however here the aim was for different levels of learning rather than no intention to learn.

Coaching psychologists, however, have utilised aspects of narrative both in theory and practice. Stelter and Law (2010: 159), in their work on narrative-collaborative practice, which is about both the role of the advisor and the role of narrative, outline an approach to coaching as a reflective space to *'give space for the unfolding of narratives'* whereby the narratives establish *'temporal coherence and show how events, actions, other persons and ourselves can be experienced and perceived as sensible and meaningful'*. They acknowledge that their application of coaching can be based on two central dimensions of meaning making:

- 1 *Meaning is formed through the actual experiences and (implicit) knowledge the individual acquires in different life contexts. This concept of experiential meaning making can be linked to the concept of experiential learning.*
- 2 *Meaning is shaped through social narratives that describe the focus of the person's life practice. This process of meaning making is a process of co-creation between coach and coachee and can be related to a form of social learning.*

Coaching here can be seen as similar to the action of the advisor in the assessment of competence where they assist the candidate to achieve their narratives and demonstrate their competence in relation to the professional standards.

The role of the advisor in the assessment of competence therefore encompasses some of the explanation of the role of narrative, but also the act of storytelling, where the advisor through their questioning and listening enables the candidate to tell their story effectively and enables them to

make the connection between their experience and the assessment criteria. This is structurally similar to the process of coaching but with different expected outcomes.

2.7.3 Learning from the assessment of competence where there is no intention to learn

In most cases the assessment of competence is designed to evidence learning that candidates have achieved as a result of a development programme. Candidates are not expected to learn from the actual assessment process itself. There is research from the perspective of the candidate in the assessment of competence that focuses on their experience of learning (Kicken et al, 2009; Spielhofer, 2001) but even where this may acknowledge the role of an advisor it is not about their role in enabling learning, nor does it consider a role that narrative has in candidates' learning.

Although in most instances assessment of competence focuses on evidencing what candidates have done and learned during their development programme there is some limited evidence of learning actually from an assessment process in addition to the intended learning. An early example of this was, when looking at the origins of APL and its value, Fennell (1991) reported the findings from Job Training Scheme clients who, following their Employment Potential Interview (comparable in structure to an APL process), expressed their surprise at how competent they were. Similarly, Simosko (1992) reported comments from candidates who had experienced APL which included the following quote:

'I have more confidence in myself, I have proved I can do it and I feel as if I have really done something worthwhile'

She also advised that when developing their portfolios for APL, students *'develop not just their portfolios but themselves'*.

Some of the recent research and discussions around RPL and APL have been in the context of recognising candidates' prior learning in order to gain access to academic programmes. For example, Fenwick (2006) is critical of an RPL process where 'adults are what they have done'. In the situations which she describes candidates are asked to produce a portfolio or write an 'autobiography'. Although there are standards or criteria that these should meet in order for candidates to be accepted onto programmes, there does not appear to be support from someone in an advisory capacity to support the candidates in discussing their work or in writing their submissions. Pokorny (2006: 268), in her discussion of the work the worth of portfolios and APEL interviews, comments that the 'engagement with the candidates' contexts is likely to be more fruitful' as interviews offer a potential means for an assessor to explore candidates' contexts through dialogue. This supports the

ideas around the value of storytelling and reflection in enabling learning in the assessment of competence process.

Taras' (2001) examination of fundamental issues relating how assessment could and should be carried out, found a strong theme to be the relationship between assessment and learning and development. Assessment tools that required greater involvement by candidates were seen to be effective learning and development tools and therefore lead to increased competence. Also such processes increased motivation, interest and self value. How people are assessed will significantly affect the way they think about themselves, their careers, their advisors and assessors. Candidates who have received constructive feedback feel a rise in self-esteem, an enhanced sense of well being, a greater sense of commitment to their organisation and their career and an increased sense of motivation to undertake further training and development

Although their comments relate to assessors and assessment rather than advisors and advice there are some aspects of the advisors' role that would inevitably include candidate involvement and constructive feedback.

What prompts candidates to pursue the process that assesses their competence when there is no intention to learn? In many cases APL or RPL is the means to an end for candidates as it allows them access to further education, which could be at Further Education or Higher Education level as Harris (2006: 2) acknowledges:

'the outcomes of recognition can involve non-traditional access, the award of advanced standing (or credit) within formal education and training or serve as a basis for an individually negotiated learning programme (as in work based learning for example)'

The motivation for using APL is the outcome and there is no recognition of learning or even learning from the process. A qualifications framework with a clear set of learning outcomes *'allows anyone who believes they have acquired the necessary skills and knowledge to become qualified without further study'* (Young 2008: 129) which indicates a different reason for the assessment of competence. The motivation to learn is different from the motivation for assessment: an individual may be motivated to learn because that learning is valued in their workplaces or communities (Young, 2008). McDowell (1991) related orientations to study with reasons for study: an intrinsic orientation links to an expectation of learning something of fairly immediate use in their work situation, and an extrinsic orientation links to a broader desire to gain a qualification required for career progression. Little et al (2005) commented, in relation to part-time HE students, that tutors or

advisors should try to *'make time for early conversations with part-time students about their prior learning experiences and their motivations for current study as one way of identifying appropriate routes to positive learning outcomes'*. The implication of this is that discussions with competence route candidates about their experiences and their motivation could lead to learning outcomes.

The literature focuses on the assessment of prior learning through portfolio building although there is some recognition that the process, through reflection, writing and discussion does enable some form of learning to occur.

2.8 Summary and conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed the definitions of certain key ideas that informed my research around learning, assessment and competence and concluded that there are three types of knowledge or learning that appear relevant to learning in the context of the assessment of competence: propositional, process and personal. These are useful to determine the nature of knowledge contained within the standards that candidates are expected to meet and also to determine the nature of candidates' learning from the assessment of competence.

The assessment process can include aspects of formative and summative assessment but an important factor to consider is the role of standards as assessment criteria and whether these are the only aspects of learning that candidates evidence. Competence as a concept has been widely debated as well as the relevance of standards in criterion referenced assessment.

The three research issues have highlighted that although there is much research that covers areas that are similar to this study, there is a gap in addressing the role of narrative and the role of the advisor in the assessment of competence, specifically how these contribute to learning through the assessment of competence when there is no intention to learn.

3 Methodological approach and methods

3.1 Introduction to the approach

In this chapter I explain how the methods I used in this study enabled me to answer my research questions and my exploration into the relationship between assessment of competence and learning, specifically the role of advisor and narrative in that relationship. I begin by explaining my methodological framework, then my data collection methods.

This study focuses on the PAC route to professional membership of the CIPD. This route uses 'stories' or narrative in two specific situations during candidates' assessment of competence. In the first, candidates describe their experiences and provide evidence of situations that relate to the standards or assessment criteria – and they are supported in this process by an advisor who, in dialogue, elicits from the candidate their 'stories' of their work experiences. From these discussions the candidates write 'storyboards' of those examples from their roles that show how the work they have done meets the required standards. In Genette's (1988) terms they '*narrate*' the '*story*' and these are then written up as 'storyboards' or '*narratives*'. These storyboards, the submissions from the candidates for assessment, form the first, qualitative secondary data set. When candidates are assessed they may again '*narrate*' their '*stories*' to their assessor who is required to determine whether they are 'competent'. Here in relation to Brophy's (2009) concept of narrative, the judgement is made by the candidate and the advisor of the appropriateness of the story to meet the assessment criteria.

As well as the stories the candidates narrate of their work experiences (within their storyboards), I was interested in their version of their experience of creating the storyboards and preparing for assessment and from these versions I wanted to be able to establish the relationship of this experience to their learning. The second source of data was, therefore, the conversations I had with candidates where they narrated the process of portfolio development and told me their version of the 'story' of their assessment.

I was also interested in the views of the advisors about their roles in this process. To what extent did they see themselves as merely licensing the qualification, or did they see themselves having a role facilitating candidates' learning?

Polkinghorne's (1988: 177) description of the goal of narrative analysis to '*uncover the common themes or plots in the data*' provided me with a methodological approach and method appropriate for analysing these narratives. Narrative research (Polkinghorne, 2007) makes claims about how people understand situations, others and themselves. Webster and Mertova's (2007) framework for using Narrative Inquiry as a research method considers a range of constituent parts, with the themes of 'human centredness' and 'complexity' at the highest level that both govern and justify the methodology. This framework was used both to analyse the data and to present the findings from that data analysis. These themes are evident in this research which is an attempt to

'provide an insight to those human traits of understanding that may be neglected in traditional and modernist approaches to research' (Webster and Mertova: 102)

They acknowledge the usefulness of storytelling to human centred research and assert that:

'storytelling is a natural and common form of human communication, and that storytelling is used to communicate those elements of experience that have had a profound impact on the individual' (ibid: 103)

and they propose a critical event approach to uncover issues relevant to human activity that other methodologies are unlikely to cover. Analysis of the storyboards as artefacts considered critical events (defined as non-routine) and examples of learning. Analysis of the conversations again looked for critical events and learning. The importance of the role of the advisor in this could only be established from the conversations I had with candidates and advisors where this was seen in the context of the standards, the candidates' storyboards and the knowledge and learning they evidenced within their storyboards, and as a result of the portfolio building and assessment process.

Each candidate and advisor brought their own experience of the portfolio building process, where the 'I' is a necessary requirement and this concurs with the emphasis on a human centred approach, and as such Narrative Inquiry has an inherent interest in human factors relating to the acquisition of knowledge.

3.2 Overview of the methodological framework

By adopting a constructivist perspective, I was using elements of social development theory (Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 2004) which indicate that social interaction precedes development, with consciousness and cognition as the products of social behaviour. As Brophy (2009: 28) points out, the move away from a positivist standpoint in the study of human behaviour has led to the use of narrative as a form of discourse where the purpose is to convey meaning, not as undisputed fact but usually '*by encouraging the drawing of inferences by the listener*'. As a methodology, Narrative

Inquiry is an example of what Brophy (2009: 31) described as *'just how much the emphasis has shifted towards a central role for narrative and story'*. In terms of an individual candidate's attempt to make sense of their world, social constructivism argues that the construction of meaning, and thus learning, is a shared enterprise with the function of development as firstly on the social level (inter-psychological) and then within the individual (intra-psychological) (Vygotsky, 1978). I would argue that this is just one way of 'learning' amongst many but as such it is wholly applicable to the advice process of the assessment of competence because a key aspect of this view is that learning occurs through the interaction between an individual's internal and external conditions.

3.3 Candidates

Candidate	Organisation	Role(s)	Personal
1	Private sector, catering, multi site, 56,000 employees	Group Compensation and Benefits Manager	Female
2	2 organisations Private sector, health care, multi site, 6,500 employees and 1,400 employees	Group Director (Learning and Development and Quality) Independent Consultant (Learning and Development)	Female
3	Public sector, Local Authority, 3 sites, 350 employees	HR Officer (Health and Safety and Learning and Development)	Female
4	Public Sector, civil service (Government Agency), number of employees not stated	Head of Learning and Development	Female
5	Public sector, European, scientific, number of employees not stated TUPE to similar organisation Own company	HR Generalist HR Generalist Learning and Development Consultant	Female
6	Private sector, Electronic (R&D), 7 sites, 600+ employees	HR Director	Male
7	Public sector, Energy, 2 sites, number of employees not stated	Group HR Manager	Male

Table 2 Candidates, organisations and roles

It was possible to determine from their interviews and the content of their storyboards the diversity of the candidates across sectors and size of organisation, roles and gender (**Table 2 - Candidates, organisations and roles**).

3.4 Data collection

3.4.1 Data from candidates

I felt it was important to seek the experience of candidates who had completed their assessment of competence relatively recently so that they would be able to comment on the process. Candidates at one centre who had completed within the previous three months were invited to participate in this research. This timescale was chosen so that the advice and assessment process was still relatively recent and the candidates would be able to recall it reasonably well. Candidates who had been neither advised nor assessed by the researcher were asked so that there was limited opportunity for bias from the candidates or the researcher as we had not had contact before the interview.

Candidates were asked, after their PAC portfolio assessment, if they were willing to participate in this research. They were told the nature and purpose of the research and that primary data would be collected via a telephone conversation. They were asked for their permission for me to analyse the storyboards from their portfolios as a source of secondary data.

The original intention was to collect data from at least ten candidates to give sufficient data to be analysed from as wide a variety of candidates as possible. As there had been a previous investigation into learning from the PAC process that had shown learning was taking place, the intended sample size of ten was chosen to be a large enough sample to determine the type of learning and the role of written narrative and advisor in that learning. The sample was needed not to make generalisations about the population of candidates but about learning from the process of assessment. What was important was that the sample included candidates who had completed the PAC route and were prepared to talk about their experience and allow their storyboards to be analysed. As Gray (2009: 153) noted, that when working with small sample sizes *'it is the **quality** of the sample that becomes more important than the size'* which is the case with this study.

The invitation to participate was initially sent in December 2009, by the PAC Centre Manager using an email that I had prepared, to 32 candidates who had completed their assessment within the previous three months. There were disappointingly only two responses. A further invitation was sent

out in January to the candidates who had not responded and this resulted in one more response. I conducted the interviews with these three candidates during January and February 2010. As I needed more data from as many candidates as possible, another invitation was sent out in April 2010 which resulted in two more candidates willing to participate and I interviewed these in May. One last attempt to obtain participants was made in June when two more candidates came forward and I carried out their interviews in July. This gave me seven sets of data to analyse. Although this was not the minimum number of ten candidates that I had originally intended to include there was richness in the quantity and quality of the data from the candidates' storyboards and interviews that concurred with the views contained within narrative research literature. The importance in this research is not issues of generalisability but that narrative inquiry and storytelling research:

'seeks to elaborate and and investigate individual interpretations and worldviews of complex and human centred events' (Webster and Mertova, 2007: 89)

The argument here is that the validity of narrative is more to do with the meaningful analysis of the data and elaboration than with the number of participants. If the intention for the study was for a representative sample of candidates, this self selection method and sample size would have been inappropriate. However, as what was needed was a sample of candidates who had completed, and the amount of data was sufficiently rich, seven candidates were considered to be acceptable.

In their telephone conversations with me I asked the candidates to tell me the 'story' of their assessment which included their storyboard and portfolio development, gathering their evidence, and their final assessment interview.

The interviews with the seven candidates were all conducted by telephone, digitally recorded and transcribed as Word documents (see **Appendix 1 – Candidate 3 Interview transcription**). The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and an hour. I listened to the tapes and read the transcriptions through at the same time to check for accuracy and they were also checked through by another person for accuracy. Where the candidates said something that could not be heard on the tape this was highlighted on the transcription. This was a particular issue with one candidate who had a strong Scottish accent, although it was only the occasional word, and the meaning was still apparent in what was said. As the transcripts of the conversations have been checked for accuracy, the meaningfulness of their analysis will be similar to that of the written narratives or storyboards. Kvale (1996: 20) uses the term '*conversation*' to describe interviews in a philosophical discourse and the interactions of daily life where '*it is no longer the will of the individual person that is determinative*' but there is statement and counterstatement. He contrasts this with the

professional interview, with research interviews as an example, where the professional is in charge of the questioning of more or less voluntary and naive subjects and there tends to be one-sided questioning of the subject by the professional. Kvale (1996: 30) defines the purpose of the qualitative research interview to *'obtain descriptions of the lived world of the interviewees with respect to interpretations of the meaning of the described phenomena'*. Twelve aspects of the research interview are outlined and have been applied to this research

- **Life world** – the topic of the interviews was the 'lived world' of the candidates in terms of both their experiences as HR professionals and their experience of the assessment of their competence
- **Meaning** – the central themes in the life world of candidates were sought and interpreted as 'critical incidents'. As interviewer and researcher I interpreted and put meaning on what had been disclosed to me during their interviews
- **Qualitative** – the interviews were seeking qualitative knowledge expressed in normal language and there was no aim at quantification during the interviews
- **Descriptive** – by asking the participants to tell me the story of their journey I attempted to gain nuanced descriptions of different aspects of their life worlds
- **Specificity** – rather than asking for general opinions the candidates were specifically asked for their descriptions of their own situations as candidates
- **Deliberate naiveté** – I deliberately asked the candidates to tell me the story of their experience of assessment of competence rather than having ready-made categories or schemes of interpretation. I specifically did not ask candidates what they had learned from the assessment of competence process as I wanted them to concentrate on reflecting on the experience, to retell and re-live their experience
- **Focussed** – the interview was focused on the theme of their experience as candidates and was neither strictly structured with standardised questions nor entirely non-directive but was responsive to the direction that the candidate went with questions that then probed the candidate's descriptions
- **Ambiguity** – it was my role to clarify any ambiguities or contradictory statements and whether these were due to a failure of communication in the interview or whether they reflected real contradictions in the interviewee.
- **Change** – during the interview process the interviewee may come to change their descriptions and meanings about a theme. By enabling candidates to reflect on their assessment process they may change their view of the meaning of that experience

- **Sensitivity** – these interviews were all conducted by the same interviewer and as such I may have produced the same themes given my sensitivity to and knowledge of the topic. The requirement of sensitivity to, and foreknowledge of, the topic of the interview contrasts with the advocating of a pre-suppositionless, naive approach. In my analysis I tried to bracket out my previous experience of the assessment of competence and look at the data from a naive viewpoint to be able to determine reliable and valid themes.
- **Interpersonal situation** – Kvale (1996: 35) uses the term '*inter view*' to emphasise the interactional nature of the conversation and the reciprocal influence that occurred between the researcher and the candidate. The intention was to promote '*positive feelings of a common intellectual curiosity and reciprocal respect*'.
- **Positive Experience** – in the same way, by taking an interest, being sensitive towards and seeking to understand the experience of the candidate (through a conversation not dissimilar to that they should have had with their advisor) the research interview could have been a favourable experience for the candidate. The transcriptions of the interviews were what was used for data analysis but anecdotally each of the candidates stated, after the interviews had been concluded and the recording stopped, that they had enjoyed the experience of our conversation

As secondary data source I obtained all the narratives (or storyboards), with their permission, that each candidate wrote as the stories of their HR experience. Each candidate had completed the People Management and Development field which meant that there were seven versions of this storyboard, one for each candidate (see Appendix 2 **Candidate 3 - People Management and Development**). Most candidates will complete this field unless they have already completed this via a study route.

A difference between candidates was whether they were considered to be Executive, Standard or Candidate led. This refers to the amount of support they got from their Advisor. Executive candidates get the highest level of support: the candidates tell their story and the storyboards are actually typed by the Advisor who asks them questions and elicits their experiences and identifies relevant evidence. The storyboards for executive candidates are often shorter than those completing by other routes as the Advisors are experienced in how much detail is needed and can ask questions to determine the information required to meet the standards. The Advisor should be writing the story in the candidates' words. Standard candidates are supported by the Advisor helping them to

Candidate number	Executive	Standard	Candidate led
1	x		
2	x		
3	x		
4		x	
5		x	
6	x		
7		x	

Table 3 Candidates' Advisory Route

identify experience and evidence but the candidates must write their own storyboards. Candidate led candidates have a minimum level of support and write their own storyboards and have fewer meetings with their Advisor. The seven participating candidates were as shown in **Table 3 - Candidates' Advisory Route**.

As well as the field of People Management and Development, the candidates choose 4 from 19 optional Electives and the choices they made were as shown in **Table 4 - Candidates' Choice of Electives**. Candidate 1 only completed 3 Electives via this route as she already had a Certificate in Employment Law which gave her exemption from the Employment Law Elective.

The 10 electives chosen by the candidates in this sample were:

- Managing the Training and Development Function
- Health and Safety
- Pensions
- Performance Management
- Managing Organisational Learning and Knowledge
- Management Development
- Employee Relations

- Employee Reward
- Learning and Development
- Designing and Delivering Training

There were narratives (or storyboards) for each of the Electives completed by the candidates.

Candidate	Managing the training and development function	Health and Safety	Pensions	Performance management	Managing organisational learning and knowledge	Management development	Employee relations	Employee Reward	Learning and development	Designing and delivering training
1			X	X				X		
2	X				X				X	X
3	X	X				X	X			
4	X			X		X				X
5					X	X			X	X
6				X		X	X	X		
7	X				X				X	X

Table 4 Candidates' Choice of Electives

3.4.2 Data from advisors

In addition to the data from candidates I felt it was important to seek the experience of advisors so that they would be able to comment on their view of the assessment of competence process. Advisors at the same centre as the candidates were invited to participate in this research. Those who volunteered were told the nature and purpose of the research and that primary data would be collected via a telephone conversation and sent an Information and consent form (**Appendix 7**) which they were asked to read and sign.

The three advisors who volunteered were different from those who had advised the candidates used in this study. As with the candidates, the sample was needed not to make generalisations about the population of advisors but about their views of the process. What was important was that the

sample included advisors who had worked with PAC candidates and were prepared to talk about their experience.

The interviews with the three candidates were all conducted by telephone, digitally recorded and transcribed as Word documents (see **Appendix 8 – Advisor 2 Interview transcription**). The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. I transcribed the interviews in the same way as those with the candidates.

In their telephone conversations with me I asked the advisors to tell me the ‘story’ of their experience of advising in relation to one candidate. By focusing on one experience they could more easily describe what their role had been. I was then able to invite them to explain how the example they had chosen differed from their experience with other candidates.

3.4.3 Standards

In order to explain the context of the data it was necessary to understand the construction of the standards the candidates were seeking to meet. The CIPD standards contain what are described as Operational Indicators (OIs) which are the performance criteria or competences, and they contain Knowledge Indicators (KIs) which are said to underpin the OIs and the candidates also need to demonstrate that they meet these through their evidence or storyboards.

The CIPD Standards were examined and the Operational Indicators and Knowledge Indicators considered in terms of their knowledge/learning type as **propositional**, **process** or **personal** to enable comparison with knowledge/learning that occurred in the storyboards.

3.5 Data analysis

There was a considerable quantity of data to be analysed and this was managed using Mertova and Webster’s (2007) framework.

3.5.1 Framework for narrative research

I chose to use the framework for Narrative Inquiry developed by Mertova and Webster (2007) because as it is a methodology based around narrative, it corresponded with the narrative aspects of my research. Narrative Inquiry is founded on the principles of social constructivism similar to the way that my research is located within a Vygotskian perspective of seeing learning as a social and collaborative process and one which values students’ prior experience. From this perspective it is the

social context which is important and it is that which brings about knowledge development within individuals. Vygotsky emphasised the importance of language and dialogue, the social contexts of learning in the construction of knowledge and the students' unassisted and assisted capabilities which resonate completely with the role of the advisor in the process I studied. I also chose it as a useful tool to enable me to consider my data within an appropriate framework acknowledging that not all the elements would be relevant but would help to ensure that those aspects had at least been considered.

Narrative Inquiry is based on a critical event approach. The activities and events the candidates included in their portfolio storyboards were considered to be 'critical events' purely because these were the events they chose to include as evidence of their competence. When asking my candidates for the story of their experience of the assessment process this also identified what, to them, could be described as '*critical events*'. According to Bohl (1995) it is the impact on the storyteller that makes an event critical and to Woods (1993: 102) when it has the '*right mix of ingredients at the right time and in the right context*'. Webster and Mertova (2007; 79) define critical events as '*an event selected because of its unique, illustrative and confirmatory nature*'

I chose to focus on what was defined as '*critical events*' as in accordance with Polkinghorne's (1988) view a finding is significant if it is '*important*'. I chose to view the candidates' events in the data as 'critical' because they had chosen to include them in their evidence or their description of events.

3.6 Strengths and limitations of this approach

Polkinghorne (1988) points out the insufficiency of using statistical methods in seeking logical certainty of findings in human science research. He proposes that human sciences should also aim at producing results which are 'believable' and 'verisimilar'. He emphasises the fact that people often interpret statistical results to mean that findings are important whereas in narrative methods a finding is significant if it is 'important'. Webster and Mertova (2007) propose a 'critical event' approach where participants re-tell their understanding of events - and in this research the aim was to establish what is 'important' in the relationship between assessment and learning and the role of the advisor/assessor.

The definitions of reliability and validity commonly used in traditional, objectivist research require redefining for narrative research because they concern realist assumptions and so are largely irrelevant to narrative studies. Narrative research, such as this, is more concerned with individual

truths than identifying generalisable and repeatable events. Polkinghorne (1988) claims that the reliability of narrative research usually refers to the dependability of the data and the trustworthiness of the notes or transcripts. Validity typically refers to the strength and meaningful analysis of the data. New measures such as access, honesty, verisimilitude, authenticity, familiarity, transferability and economy are needed (Huberman, 1995) which are included in Webster and Mertova's (2007) framework. The candidates' storyboards are dependable and trustworthy as data as they came from the candidates themselves and are necessarily supported by, and support, the evidence the candidates present. So as well as a candidate claiming to have experienced an event or incident, e.g. prepared for an Employment Tribunal, they would also have to have provided authentic evidence of that event for their portfolio. The potential limitation for Narrative Inquiry analysis around the definition and identification of 'significant' critical events and learning is countered by the meaningful analysis and consistency of having one analyst, but also from the large quantity of rich, written storyboard data from candidates. Polkinghorne (1988: 10) states that

'participants' stories may leave out or obscure aspects of the meaning of experiences they are telling about'

This was in some way countered by attending to the candidates' responses through an open listening stance which assisted in hearing their voices.

A strength of using Narrative Inquiry as the research method is its ontological coherence and alignment with my view of the inherent value of using stories in a variety of situations as vehicles for learning. This can lead to one of the risks Webster and Mertova (2007: 108) highlight as '*smoothing*': the tendency to invoke a positive result regardless of the indications of the data and the extent to which I was seeking examples that supported my view which could be countered with a 'critical' view from another source. This process of smoothing has also been described as 'confirmatory bias'. Another limitation (ibid: 114) is that data analysis can encourage a 'narrowing view of the data' and lead to an endless 'burrowing' process rather than a 'broadening' approach. I countered this by focusing on the critical events in the narratives. The structure of the framework of Narrative Inquiry, whilst it incorporates many constituent parts, and so appears to cover all aspects, may have proved a constraint if I did not

'adapt, adopt or further develop it' (ibid: 103)

if required relative to my particular research.

3.7 Knowledge and learning

When looking at the types of learning in the narratives and the interviews I used Eraut's (1994) terms of **propositional**, **process** and **personal** learning as described and defined in the Literature Review.

The interview transcriptions with the candidates were considered for '*critical events*', knowledge/learning, and motives for achieving PAC. The learning from these interviews is summarised in **Appendix 3 – Learning from interviews**. The narratives or storyboards were examined for candidate's '*critical events*', and for examples of knowledge/learning, which were categorised under the three types of learning and were summarised to show the extent of the occurrence of '*critical events*' and knowledge/learning (see **Appendix 4 – Spreadsheet - summary PM&D**). The individual candidates were then considered by bringing together the previous analyses for each one and looking for themes in relation to critical incidents in the storyboards; knowledge/learning in the storyboards; and from the assessment process, critical incidents, knowledge/learning, and motives (see **Appendix 5 – Spreadsheet – key findings**).

The interview transcriptions with the advisors were considered for examples of how the advisors saw their own roles and for how the advisors viewed the candidates and their experiences. These were then categorised under themes that emerged from the analysis (**Appendix 9 – Interview analysis advisors**).

3.8 Ethical Issues

In order to consider some of the actual and potential issues involved in researching with candidates and advisors the role of narrative in assessment and learning, I have used the ethical principles identified by Bell and Bryman (2007) from their content analysis of ethics codes from nine social scientific associations and applied to management research. This analysis drew on codes from across social science research and reinforces Collins' (2000) notion that it is problematic for an individual researcher to deal with ethical issues without recourse to guidelines or a framework because of the assumption that researchers are aware of what constitutes an ethical issue and also whether they are prepared to regulate their own behaviour in accordance with what they believe to be right in a given situation. As this set of principles was derived from a number of ethics codes from the field of social science, I felt that it included all the possible aspects that I needed to address and as a framework helped me to consider those aspects. Also, as I was investigating HR managers in a

learning and assessment situation, a framework that had been applied to management research seemed an appropriate source and approach.

Bell and Bryman (2007) identified four levels of specificity in the codes: ethical tone, ethical values, ethical principles and ethical practices. They identified eleven ethical principles and I considered my research in relation to these as they highlight potential issues that I could face in researching my area of educational practice:

- harm to participants
- informed consent
- anonymity
- dignity
- privacy
- confidentiality
- affiliation
- honesty and transparency
- deception
- misrepresentation
- reciprocity

3.8.1 Harm to participants

This principle relates to the *'potential to cause harm through the research process and the need to ensure physical and psychological well-being either of the research participants, the researcher or others'* (Bell and Bryman, 2007: 71). With this research there was no apparent opportunity for physical harm to participants, researcher or others through the analysis of candidates' work or through their narratives of their assessment. The psychological well-being of parties involved may depend on the assumptions I made that this had been a positive experience for candidates. As Hallowell et al (2005: 17) describe, there is a potential for a range of emotional responses from participants in these circumstances who may not have had a positive experience in their assessment. For example, if the candidates negatively criticised the advisors or assessors about something of which they were previously unaware it might be difficult to address these issues to the satisfaction of the candidates. This research was not about finding out about how different advisors conducted their advice sessions but was to seek the views of the candidates about the process. This was potentially important and relevant to other stakeholders in the whole PAC process but also in other structurally similar situations.

3.8.2 Informed consent

This is *'the need to ensure the fully informed consent of research participants'* (Bell and Bryman, 2007: 71). The principle of informed consent can be traced back to the formation of the Nuremberg Code (Katz, 1992) which forms the basis for ensuring the protection of vulnerable people. As this research was being conducted as part of a PhD study, I completed the university's Ethical Approval Form and this was approved by my Supervisor. As well as consulting the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2009) I also produced, obtained approval for and used an information sheet for candidates and advisors and a consent form (see **Appendix 6 - PhD Information Sheet, Appendix - 7 PhD Information Sheet Advisors**).

Bell and Bryman (2007) also note in relation to this principle that few codes address the notion of power relations and that in educational research the participants are often children. My research with adult participants would have the potential for different forms of power relations. Using Handy's (1993) definitions of power, my roles in the organisation (where I am also an Advisor, Assessor and Internal Verifier) and as an insider researcher mean that I would have the potential for Position, Expert, and Negative power. I ensured that I only used data from candidates I had not advised, assessed or internally verified to remove any perceived power candidates may have felt I had to influence the results of their assessments through these sources.

3.8.3 Anonymity

This refers to *'the protection of anonymity of individuals or organisations'* (Bell and Bryman, 2007: 71). Participants were informed of the maintenance of their anonymity and that of their organisations in the research through the Information Sheet and Consent Form. The results were analysed and presented without reference to individuals or organisations by name, although there was some distinction in the analysis relating to gender or sector to consider the diversity of the sample.

3.8.4 Dignity

This is described as the *'requirement to respect the dignity of research participants, researchers or others to avoid causing discomfort or anxiety'* (Bell and Bryman, 2007: 71). By concentrating on the candidates' own 'story' in the interviews and ensuring that these conversations were conducted in a manner which established *'an atmosphere in which the subject feels safe enough to talk freely about his or her experiences and feelings'* Kvale (1996: 125) where the potential for anxiety and discomfort

was minimised. Covert methods were not used as I wanted the candidates to tell their stories in their own words.

Cassell's (1982) continuum of possibility of harm or wrongdoing would recognise that in this form of educational research there is little possibility of harm but still the capacity to wrong the research participants. Drawing on Kant's idea of the categorical imperative, Cassell's definition of wrong involves the unconditional moral obligation to preserve the dignity, humanity and values of others. Treating research participants as a means to an end rather than as important in themselves would constitute 'wrongdoing' in research. I needed to recognise the needs of the research participants, for example they were given the opportunity to see the transcripts of their interviews to authenticate them and the final research results or they could choose to just participate in the research.

3.8.5 Privacy

Privacy is described as the *'need to protect privacy of research subjects or avoid invasions of privacy'* (Bell and Bryman, 2007: 71). This depended, to an extent, on my abilities as an interviewer to encourage participants to disclose only that which was relevant to the research question and for me not to question beyond that, and if participants had chosen to disclose inappropriate information it was incumbent on me to ensure that I protected their privacy, but this did not occur in the research.

3.8.6 Confidentiality

This is seen as the *'requirement to ensure confidentiality of research data whether relating to individuals, groups or organisations'* (Bell and Bryman, 2007: 71). The way in which I present the data in this thesis must be appropriate to the method, purpose and recipients. Similarly, any report to the awarding body and my employers must maintain that confidentiality.

There is always the proviso that if any issues which relate to confidentiality and the previous headings of 'harm to participants', 'anonymity', 'dignity' or 'privacy' need to be reported either personally or professionally, for example in relation to assessment, this would be possible. This could relate to the professional issues of assessment for my colleagues and employer and may have to cite specific individuals. I did not anticipate significant issues arising because of the robustness of the verification system in place in the Centre. However, if any issues had been brought to my attention that other employees or my employer needed to be informed about, I would have done so in general terms as advice or feedback for improvement, rather than naming individual candidates or their organisations.

3.8.7 Affiliation

Affiliation is described as the *'need to declare any professional or personal affiliations that may have influenced the research, including conflicts of interest and sponsorship, including information about where the funding for the research came from'* (Bell and Bryman, 2007: 71). I needed to declare in my Information sheet the capacity in which I am employed by the Centre and that I am self- funding my qualification and research with no affiliation to any research organisation or to any professional body.

3.8.8 Honesty and transparency

This refers to the *'need for openness and honesty in communicating information about the research to all interested parties, including the need for trust'* (Bell and Bryman, 2007: 71). I considered producing a Stakeholder Analysis (Young and Mendizabal, 2009) to consider the relative Power and Interest of stakeholders in relation to the research and the communication needs of the stakeholders which would show who needed to be:

- kept informed
- engaged with closely
- monitored for changes in their information requirements
- kept satisfied or involved

of what and at what stage. The main stakeholders are the Centre partners who have moderate interest but low overall power (especially once the data had been collected) and I have kept them informed during our regular informal meetings. I have engaged closely with my Supervisor who has high power and interest in my research and my final thesis.

3.8.9 Deception

This is defined as the *'potential for deception through the research process, either through lies or behaviour that is misleading'* (Bell and Bryman, 2007: 71). This again was an issue that was addressed by the Information Sheet and Consent Form and as these were approved by my Supervisor there should not be any issues of deliberate lying or deception. It was important also to keep comprehensive and accurate records of interviews, transcriptions and data analysis for verification purposes if needed. Regardless of issues of possible deception, this is good practice in research anyway.

3.8.10 Misrepresentation

This encompasses the '*need to avoid misleading, misrepresenting or false reporting of research findings*' (Bell and Bryman, 2007: 71). The need to attempt to be objective in research, recording and analysing results is inevitably challenging because both as researchers and as individuals we see our research through the frameworks that we choose. The '*double hermeneutic*' (Usher, 1996) means that as a researcher I am seeking to make sense of what my participants have understood and learned from their assessment of competence by using the frameworks of storytelling and narrative inquiry. In order to use these frameworks I need to understand them and how they are applicable to my research. If I misunderstand these frameworks I may mislead or misrepresent my findings. The issue of accurate record keeping as mentioned before has avoided some aspects of false reporting.

As an HR professional I will have brought my background and experiences to my research analysis which is by definition limited. There are advantages in sharing the profession with my candidates and having the roles of assessor, adviser and verifier as I can understand the storyboards easily and why they are written in the way that they are. A disadvantage could come from being too close to the HR subjects that participants write about and the need to remain detached from assessing their material as an assessor of competence but focusing on it in terms of narrative analysis and their critical events.

3.8.11 Reciprocity

This is the relatively novel idea in ethics codes that '*research should be of mutual benefit to researcher and participants or that some form of collaboration or active participation should be involved*' (Bell and Bryman, 2007: 71). Whilst not approaching the '*emancipatory research*' which addresses fundamental human rights and social justice relevant in social work research (Butler, 2002: 245), there is still an opportunity to encourage further collaboration and active participation. As a minimum level of involvement in my research I asked participants to consent to my access to their '*storyboards*' and to them having a conversation with me about their experience of assessment. In order to maintain a degree of flexibility in my research I asked candidates if, as a result of further conversations or analysis, I become aware of issues that had not been mentioned in their conversations I could return to them with some extra questions. This was not necessary from my point of view. I also asked the participants to contact me if they felt that there was any aspect of their portfolio building or assessment that they had missed in our conversation that I might be interested in to complete the picture.

As HR managers and practitioners, participants should have been interested in the findings from this research and as a result of their involvement they may have had further insight into the storytelling and narrative nature of assessment and its use in other circumstances that they would be willing to share with me to extend this research beyond their assessment of competence process and further into other areas of assessment, competence or learning.

3.8.12 Insider researcher

In addition to Bell and Bryman's (2007) eleven factors I have also considered the issue of being an insider researcher. Coghlan and Holian (2007) discuss the ways in which multiple roles can both complicate and focus research, how to gain some sense of professional distance or 'objectivity' and move beyond a personal perspective by testing assumptions and interpretations. Using a framework, such as Mertova and Webster's, is seen as a useful way of enabling some aspects of this desired objectivity. Doing research in my own setting can be seen to involve managing three interlocking challenges (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005): '*preunderstanding*' which is the need to build on the closeness I have with the setting, but also creating distance from it in order to see things critically. Having '*dual roles*' or multiple roles as a member of the organisation and as a researcher, can create ambiguities which may involve role confusion, role conflict, and role overload. For participants the main issue may be role confusion as they were aware of my role in the organisation and they may not have disclosed aspects of their experience because they felt that I may have influence in the organisation, for example, to rescind their awarded qualification. For me the other issues of role conflict and role overload were potential challenges. Role conflict has been referred to previously and is the possible conflict between me as a researcher, as an advisor, as an assessor and as an internal verifier. I made a point of only targeting those candidates that I had not dealt with in any of those roles to minimise that. Role overload was more about balancing my workload at work and my research workload where I have found it important to ensure that both are addressed. Managing '*organizational politics*' means balancing the requirements of any career plans I have with requirements for the success and quality of my research. I work remotely for the organisation covering a region so I am not usually aware of the typical sort of internal organisational politics that are apparent when you are located actually in an organisational setting. My career plans are congruent with my research plans in that I wish to remain in my current role in the organisation and I wish to develop as a researcher at this level.

To summarise, from the ethical considerations and the considerations of being an insider researcher, the potential issues facing me in conducting this research were:

- the need to produce an Ethical Approval form to be approved by my supervisor, and an Information Sheet and Consent Form for participants which explained my role in the organisation and as a student; the type of data and how it will be recorded, analysed and reported; how anonymity and confidentiality issues will be addressed if potentially 'harmful' or unethical issues are uncovered
- the need to obtain data from candidates who I had not advised, assessed or verified
- the need to keep accurate and secure records of data and data analysis (which is normal good practice anyway)
- the need to fully understand the frameworks of storytelling and narrative inquiry to be able to use them appropriately in the research process
- the need to give participants the opportunity to reciprocate in the research with input after their conversations about their experiences of assessment regarding the further role of storytelling, competence and learning

3.9 Conclusion and summary

In this chapter I have explained my methodological approach, data collection methods using the candidates' written storyboards and interviews, how I have analysed these and the ethical considerations relating to this study in order to answer the research questions

- What learning occurs during the assessment of competence where there is no intention to learn?
- What is the role of narrative in the assessment of competence and learning?
- What is the role of the advisor in the assessment of competence and learning?

In the next chapter I will set out the results and analysis from this study.

4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to describe the results from the methods and analysis of the results that were found from the candidates' storyboards and the interviews I conducted with them. This chapter is structured using the research questions from this study.

The main findings were that propositional, process and personal learning does occur as a result of the use of written and spoken narrative in the assessment of competence and that this goes beyond the evidence and knowledge requirements from the assessment criteria used in the process. Candidates' propositional learning related to the theories and models that were relevant to the area being assessed. Much of this was provided by the advisor taking on the role of mentor as supporter and the learning can be related to candidates' motives for taking the qualification and route. Candidates' process learning related to the skills that candidates can transfer from the PAC process to other situations in their workplace and role. Through their advisor's role as facilitator or coach, candidates acknowledged personal learning which included increased self awareness; personal strengths and weaknesses; their preference for how to learn and the overall development of critical thinking skills and reflective practice.

4.2 What is the role of narrative in the assessment of competence?

Narrative in this context, and in relation to this question, refers to the written narrative that candidates produce. The narrative is written to explain what has been done or experienced that is being claimed as evidence of meeting a set of assessment criteria or standards.

The written narratives represent the candidates' stories because the evidence of what they have done needs this level of explanation. The written narrative provides the background to the experience, and an explanation of the candidate's role. So rather than just producing a portfolio of evidence and expecting that to demonstrate competence and how it meets the assessment criteria, candidates develop a written narrative of their experience to explain their evidence in relation to those standards.

The analysis of the candidates' storyboards (**Appendix 5 Key Findings**) using Narrative Inquiry highlighted the Outputs in relation to the Knowledge Indicators (KIs). The types of KIs were noted as **propositional, process and personal** and the actual examples included in the candidates'

storyboards were also noted. For the propositional and personal KIs the number included within the storyboards exceeded those required by the standards. For the process KIs the number included within the storyboards was much less than was required. The reason for this was the examples in the storyboards were cross referenced, so one example would be used to meet a number of the indicators therefore giving the impression that there were fewer than were needed to meet the standards.

From the results it was not possible to make claims in relation to candidate variables such as gender, organisation type, role, or candidate route (standard or executive) as there were no clear patterns emerging. There were no impressions of similarities or differences across candidates in relation to variables. In order to be able to make such claims a much larger data set would be needed that encompassed those variables.

Different roles are claimed for the written narrative, which have implications for whether the candidates learn from the process of writing about what they have done and experienced. There are three roles that the written narrative has in the assessment of competence that relate to learning: firstly the **process** itself of writing the narrative; secondly the written narrative as a tangible **product**; and lastly the actual **content** of the written narrative.

4.2.1 The process of narrative writing

The process of actually producing the written narratives will be considered first, and this can be seen as important in three different ways: the organic nature of the written narrative; the candidates' requirements for flexibility in the development of the written narrative; and the structure of the written narrative.

The first of the ways in which the process of writing the narrative is seen as important concerns its organic nature: by being able to see the narrative growing as sections are completed, candidates can see that progress is being made and this signifies how close they are to completion. As such this is a motivating factor and creates a sense of achievement, which was expressed by **Candidate 5** in the following way in a statement about the narratives that had been completed:

'I could see the progress on those; I could see that the end was in sight'

The second way in which the process of narrative writing is seen to be important is that it needs to accommodate both those who want the flexibility of being able to complete at their own pace,

through having an open approach to writing the narratives, and those who need to have deadlines and pressure to complete. This contrast is demonstrated by **Candidate 7** who commented:

'I could do a bit then put it down... It was just so much easier to go back to pick up the threads'

and **Candidate 3** who stated that

'because you are not going to college and you haven't got to do assignments by a certain date so it's good that it's flexible in that way'

whereas **Candidate 1** countered this with:

'It's not an easy thing to pick up and put down. So once you start your storyboard you really need to blitz that storyboard.'

Candidate 1 also commented that:

'I had to have that pressure of that final June date because I do work better under pressure.'

If candidates feel unable to write their narratives either because of insufficient pressure from deadlines or insufficient flexibility then they are unlikely to complete the process. This would seem to be an issue that needs to reflect the individual requirements and preferences of the candidate but should be available as options within the assessment process.

The third area that relates to the process of writing narratives sees the assessment criteria or standards that are used in the assessment process as important in that they serve to give the written narrative structure. Having a clear structure and guidelines, with possible examples, is useful to candidates to help them to understand the narrative writing process and what is required of them.

This was illustrated by **Candidate 7**

'The fact that it is a structured portfolio approach was good for me because I quite like to see structure there. But for me I think the most invaluable part was the storyboards themselves – having the format for each of the storyboards with some indication of typical evidence that you were expected to generate that was ideal for being able to get the work from the workplace'

Interestingly **Candidate 4** commented in relation to structure that:

'there was an element of "this was not my preferred way of doing things at all". It's a lot more detailed, a lot more structured and a lot less critical and conceptual than I would normally like but actually the fact that I did it was quite satisfying. It was kind of a different route than I would normally take'

which highlights that even when this process is recognised as not being a candidate's preference; it was still '*satisfying*'.

These aspects that relate to the process of narrative development show that there were elements of how their narrative was seen to be progressing, and also how it was structured and constructed which were important to candidates and that enabled them to re-engage with their experiences. Being able to see the portfolio develop and grow, gives a sense of achievement, acknowledgement of what has been achieved, and encourages candidates to continue and complete their written narratives. Being able to *'do a bit then put it down'* gives the candidates who want it, time for reflection on their work experience and then to go back to *'pick up the threads'*. Setting deadlines for some candidates gives them the pressure they need to complete. The assessment process should recognise and acknowledge that candidates have these possibly conflicting needs. Using the structure of the standards to organise their written narrative, enables candidates to go through the process of thinking about what they have done and what they have experienced. This structure was felt to be *'invaluable'*.

4.2.2 The written narrative as a tangible product

The written narratives are not created for the candidates benefit but are written expressly for other people to read. The actual written narrative as an artefact: a tangible, physical product; is seen to be important to candidates in the way it is seen by others. The appearance of the narrative can be important to candidates both in terms of how it is written but also in the form in which it is presented.

It is important to candidates that the written narrative comes across as having been written by the candidate themselves and it is in their own words. This was demonstrated by two of the candidates:

Candidate 2 stated that they:

'wanted it to look right - how written, how it was laid out was very important to me, how it sounded'

And similarly **Candidate 6** commented about the narrative that their advisor had written that:

'what she had written down, although it was what I had said, or summary of what I had said, it didn't really come over as my voice, the way I would say it... It wasn't like it was my story - and I wanted it to look like it had come from me'

The physical appearance of the collection of the written narratives (referred to as a portfolio) is also relevant in terms of its format and as an object. Having a tangible written narrative in hard copy,

rather than in an electronic format, and making that collection look good is important to some candidates because of how it makes them feel but also other people's reaction to it.

Candidate 1 who had produced an electronic portfolio, commented about having it in a different format:

'I did it electronically which obviously saves cost but in some ways it would have been nicer to have a bound file'

Candidate 2 described the importance to them of how the overall collection of written narratives looked:

'I would make it all look beautiful and I was happy with it and (the assessors) were very happy – it was one of the best portfolios they had ever seen'

'I was very proud of it actually, I mean my evidence I am really proud of. Yes it is sitting on my shelf in two beautiful laminated portfolios.'

These are examples of the importance to candidates of the appearance and tangible nature of the written narratives. Candidates wanted the product to *'look right'* and thought that a tangible portfolio would be *'nicer'*. The issue is what difference it made to the candidate that their written narratives looked right: they were not stating that they wanted the narratives to look right for the assessor or reader necessarily but just that this was something that they wanted as candidates, so the assumption is that this was important to them. So, to restate Polkinghorne's (1988) terms the important or significant finding here is that the written narratives *'look right'*.

For **Advisor 2**, there was an issue about how the storyboards were written:

'The standard of writing really annoys me at times – it is not good, in terms of written English at times and that is a sad fact of life that grammatically and punctuation – they can't do it. I mean it's not changing their words – it's still saying how they do what they do'

Here the advisor was reinforcing candidates' desire for written work that not only looked right but was also grammatically correct.

What difference did it make to candidates how their written narratives *'looked'*? Why was that important to some candidates? In terms of their portfolios, the important elements are firstly the evidence that candidates include which demonstrates their experience, and secondly the written narratives of their experience that they write. The appearance and presentation of the portfolio are secondary to these. However, according to candidates, by bringing together examples of work experience in a written form, the portfolios focus on, and have the effect of drawing attention to,

particular aspects of the candidates' version of reality. Being a physical, durable entity, as a '*bound file*', with the characteristic of persistence that an electronic portfolio specifically does not have, was seen to be significant. These physical entities have the power to evoke meaning for and feelings in candidates, and as such are important to them.

These features of the physical product of the written narrative, echo Wenger's (1998) description of reification as both a process and a product '*the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal the experience into "thingness"*' and as such are, for candidates, a meaning making mechanism.

4.2.3. The content of the written narrative

The content of the written narrative as demonstrating the range and extent of candidates' knowledge is considered in a separate section.

In addition to the content of the written narrative as the explanation of the evidence, the content serves as setting the context for the reader. By having to consider the context as well as the content, the candidate is not only having to recall the event but also to consider the event from the perspective of the reader and what they would need to know in order to understand the experience that the candidate is recounting. This depth of reflection by the candidate is apparent in the written narrative which then includes not only a description of the event or incident that demonstrated competence but also the explanation of the context.

In relation to the content of the actual written narrative, **Candidate 1** noted the relevance of context for the readers.

'And recognising that your reader won't know what the context is. So you have to set what the context is'

4.2.4 Conclusion and summary of the role of narrative in the assessment of competence

The following points have been noted in relation to the roles that written narrative has for candidates in the assessment of their competence, which are from the process of their production; as an artefact and tangible product; and the role that their content plays in setting the context for the reader.

These indicated that the written narratives not only have an important role for the candidates themselves but that are also deemed important for the readers of their written narratives and portfolios. It is both through the candidates' consideration of the written narrative as 'important' as product or artefact, and the process of reflection that is needed to produce them, that the written narratives have a role in learning from the assessment of competence. These results contribute to the understanding of the role that the written narratives have not only in claims for competence but also as reflective tools and outputs from the assessment process that mediate between the standards and the candidates' learning.

4.3 What is the role of the advisor in the assessment of competence?

The role of the advisor can be seen in a two different ways, with relevant behaviours that have effects on the candidates and impact candidates' learning. The roles are described as Supporting, which is a more directive role with helping and instructing behaviours, and Facilitating, which is viewed as a less directive role with behaviours that are more enabling. Through the Supporting role that the advisor has in this process, candidates are supported to produce their written narratives and can also increase their propositional knowledge. Through the Facilitating role that the advisor has in this process, candidates develop what would be described in other educational settings as 'critical thinking' and they are engaging in reflective practice.

4.3.1. Advisor as supporter or mentor

The role of advisor as Supporter can be seen as important in two ways: firstly in terms of helping candidates write their narratives; and secondly in terms of offering theoretical or other forms of knowledge to the candidate.

When helping the candidate to write their narratives advisors can help in three ways which interact. Acting as an interpreter of the assessment criteria or standards is a critical part that advisors play in the overall process. They also enable candidates to find valid, authentic and sufficient examples from their work experience to meet those standards, and lastly the advisor helps candidates to analyse the gaps between the standards and their experience and help the candidates to fill those gaps.

Candidate 1 described the first behaviour that indicated the advisors were being supportive which was that of interpreting the standards:

'The storyboard themselves I found again I wouldn't have been able to understand without L's intervention. I couldn't easily just look at them, read the question or the example and say "That's what they are looking for"... She had to interpret them for me'

Unless candidates can understand the assessment criteria and what the standards mean, they are unable to determine what would be suitable examples of their experience and consequently what would be relevant evidence. This aspect is not specifically acknowledged as being part of the advisor's role, but in this way the advisor is telling the candidate what to do.

Finding examples of candidates' experience that would meet the standards is specified as part of the advisor's role, in the expectation that they will *'facilitate the identification of appropriate experience and evidence for inclusion within your portfolio'* (CIPD, 2009) or as **Candidate 5** described the way her advisor supported her:

'She basically helped me sort of delve around in my brain for the things that would satisfy each of the individual indicators that were necessary'

Candidates acknowledged that the advisor brought these two aspects together and analysed the gaps between the standards and the candidates' experience. **Candidate 6** explained how the advisor did this through:

'spending a bit of time just basically chatting about my experiences to date in HR I guess and what I had done in my role and what I had done in the past... Basically just going through my cv almost... we could sort of do a gap analysis'

Candidate 3 added that

'it did bring together the range of stuff that I do'

There were some general descriptions of advisors in a support role. **Candidate 5** described their advisor as being supportive in this way:

'having so much support was the thing that's made me get where I am'

Candidate 3 also said about their advisor that she was:

'really supportive and actually reinforced what we were doing and it was quite – it was also some transactional analysis you were going like the small child and she was being very supportive parent.'

All the advisors acknowledged the supportive or directive aspect of their role, for example where **Advisor 1** stated:

'I was telling him what the OI was about, the sorts of things we were looking for'

and *'being more directive'*

Similarly **Advisor 2** commented that:

'it is the advisor's role to sit with them and make sure that we find the evidence together and talk about examples of what they had actually done and to demonstrate their competence - it's guiding them and then getting them to put information down in their narratives straight away.'

'with a standard you are doing just that you are pointing them in the right direction'

Through the combination of these three aspects of support: interpreting standards, finding examples of experience and analysing the gap; advisors were enabling candidates to reflect on their experience but also to connect it to the standards. So this was not just reflecting on experience but identifying experience that was relevant to the standards and assessment criteria. As **Advisor 2** commented, the advisor's role was seen by candidates to be:

'holding the knowledge about what cipd standards were and what they were asking for'.

Advisors were also supportive by offering information to candidates in terms of explaining theories that were relevant to the subject areas being evidenced. These may have been Knowledge Indicators in the standards as areas that candidates should have known about relative to their elective topics, such as Designing and Delivering Training, and could have gone beyond what was required in the Knowledge Indicators. Candidates gave specific examples of theories and models that their advisor shared with them. An example of this was from **Candidate 2** who noted that

'my advisor was quite good here, she would mention all these theories and these people... But now if someone talks about Kirkpatrick or whatever I can nod'

Here the advisor was specifically sharing their knowledge with their candidate. So although there was no intention to learn from the assessment of competence process, there may have been knowledge areas that candidates did not know about in spite of having delivered pieces of work that demonstrated their competence; or there may have been aspects of propositional knowledge that went beyond what the candidates already knew. In the example cited, the advisor shared specific models with the candidate that enabled them to comprehend future conversations and discussions with clients. In this way the candidate's knowledge was explicitly developed by the advisor offering them a theory as novel propositional knowledge. Advisors acknowledged that candidates expected this of them, as **Advisor 2** noted:

'we have experience of HR and they look to us imparting some of that knowledge when discussing particular topics and they expect you to have been there, done it and know about it... "you know more than I do, so I want you to help me" '

For some candidates who were getting the greatest level of support, their advisor was actually writing the storyboards as the candidate described what they had done. So rather than just discussing the content in their advisory sessions and the candidate having to write their own storyboards, the advisor actually writes the storyboards whilst the candidate discusses their experience. So for candidates such as **Candidate 5** the support meant that:

‘the storyboards were being written for me’

Why was this level of support important for candidates? What contribution did this support make to candidates’ learning? It is most obvious in the situations where the advisor was giving information about models or theories as this made a very definite, specific contribution to candidates’ learning. In relation to the support with writing the storyboards, this support enabled the candidates to concentrate on thinking about the examples and what the suitable evidence could be as the focus of their reflection.

In addition to their espoused role, Advisors also described the motivational aspect of their role as **Advisor 3** described:

‘I think what I do try to do is try to motivate them – all of them and that is something that I do kind of think about quite a bit – about how best to motivate them’

This was echoed by **Advisor 2** who said that although:

‘most will come along and want to do the work’ But:

‘as advisors, we have to understand their personal issues and try and advise accordingly... some work better to having deadlines than others’

All the advisors noted how important it was:

‘getting to know a candidate as there are those that are pretty confident and those that need nurturing’

Although candidates were expected to complete their storyboards and gather their evidence, advisors still felt it was for them to encourage, chase up and even ‘push’ them if needed to complete.

4.3.2 Advisor as facilitator or coach

The advisor can also have a much more subtle role as facilitator which is defined here as giving guidance or enabling rather than direction. This role is much more closely aligned to that of a coach or where the advisor is not telling the candidate what to do, but is guiding them. There are several behaviours that relate to the role of facilitator that illustrate the enabling role as opposed to a

directing role: giving feedback and making suggestions; repeating back what candidates have said; and asking questions. This role of facilitator was to enable the candidates to complete their written narratives.

Several candidates made general comments in relation to the role of advisor as facilitator. **Candidate 4** stated that their advisor:

'was more of a guiding hand, as I've already said, so more of a practical facilitator'

and **Candidate 7** similarly commented that:

'in terms of the coaching and mentoring part that A played I thought the level and approach was perfect for me'

A specific example of an advisor giving feedback was noted by **Candidate 7** as:

'A was giving me feedback. The way we worked it I was able to meet with A and get his comments and suggestions. I could send him electronic versions and he could send them back for changes'

By giving comments and suggestions the advisor was not being directive or telling the candidate what to do and the advisor was able then to comment on what the candidate had actually written. This was a specific purpose that the advisor should perform of *'providing feedback'* as set out in the Candidate Handbook (CIPD, 2009). This feedback was in relation to the candidate's written narrative and not as a coach in relation to the candidate's work performance. The feedback from the advisor could be both in relation to the content of the narrative, i.e. the examples the candidates used, and in relation to the way that the narrative had been written.

This was reinforced by the advisors and illustrated by **Advisor 1**:

'my role would be much more about providing feedback – this was much more facilitative'

And Advisor 2:

'giving constructive feedback is such an important part of what we do'

A specific behaviour that was cited by **Candidate 3** was that of the advisor repeating back to the candidate what they had said:

'It is almost like when you are in therapy, you know you think "Oh that counsellor is really brilliant" and the counsellor says "Really all I've done is repeat back to you what you told me"'

In this way the advisor would be helping the candidate to reflect on their work performance rather than the production of the written portfolio. This reflection could enable the candidates to think differently about their work experiences.

In a manner similar to repeating back what the candidate had said, the advisors were cited as asking questions. These were primarily about the candidates' work examples. **Candidate 3** commented about her advisor that:

'She'd ask questions all the way through'

Candidate 2 acknowledged that they had:

'expected to go into it thinking 'I know all about it' and so some of the questions my advisor asked me to think about... my advisor was quite good here'

Candidate 6 added that

'the basic process was just me talking with the advisor asking questions occasionally, fairly open questions'

By asking questions, the advisor would be seeking clarification, and also by doing this they would enable the candidate to see their experience from someone else's point of view. These questions could even challenge what the candidate had done, as to why they had taken a particular course of action, to justify their actions, or merely to ensure that the examples did relate to the standards and assessment criteria. **Advisor 1** noted that a key aspect of their facilitation role was:

'around finding the right questions to ask to help him'

This range of behaviours that the candidates described demonstrated that the advisors were acting in a facilitative way that could be deemed to be similar to coaching. Coaching is usually acknowledged and used as a developmental, learning process. The assessment of competence was not designed to be a learning process so it may have been through processes that are similar to coaching that candidates were enabled to learn.

4.3.3 Effects of the advisors' behaviours

The effects of these roles as a 'supporter' and as 'facilitator' and related behaviours of interpreting the standards; finding relevant examples in the candidates' experience; conducting gap analysis; introducing models or theories; writing the storyboards for the candidates; giving feedback and making suggestions; repeating back what candidates have said; and asking questions, are that candidates can develop in the following ways which go beyond the requirements of the standards or assessment criteria. Candidates are able to develop critical thinking skills of seeing things from a

different point of view, seeing the relevance of their experience and they engage in reflective practice.

Candidates acknowledged that they were able to see and think about things differently, for example **Candidate 5** stated that:

'It's something that I wouldn't have come up with necessarily myself but because I was being helped to think about things in a different way, I suppose'

Through the advisor's support and facilitation the candidate acknowledged that they had been enabled to think about things differently. This was not an anticipated outcome from the assessment of competence process but was recognised by the candidate.

Candidates were also enabled to see the relevance of their experience such as **Candidate 5** who stated that:

'what I found quite interesting is that many of the things that I've done in my career, I didn't necessarily, until having those conversations, I didn't necessarily see as being directly relevant. But actually when we talked about them, I could see how they did connect'

Candidate 3 recognised that their advisor enabled them to

'realise the amount of work that you are doing and the changes that you are making'

and that:

'it was reinforcing that I can do it really'

This process of connecting the standards and assessment criteria to their experience not only helped the candidates to see the relevance of their work to the standards but was also a way of enabling them to reflect on what they had done.

Some candidates specifically commented on the aspect of reflective practice, which again is widely recognised as a development process but is not an explicit part of the assessment of competence.

Candidate 2 stated that:

'reflective practice and that is something I have never bothered with but I was made to do which I think can be a little forced. What it did was made me look back at some of the projects, writing my storyboards trying to think of it – thinking of when things had gone wrong which I could have done better or differently. It made me review these again and made me think'

What this candidate stated here summarises the nature of reflective practice and was implicitly or explicitly what the advisors were conducting when they were carrying out their espoused role. What this candidate acknowledged was that this process did was that it *'made me think'*.

4.3.3 Summary of the role of the advisor in the assessment of competence

The role of the advisor was therefore seen in a number of ways, with relevant behaviours that have effects on the candidates. Through a combination of the more directive behaviours as a Supporter and the more enabling behaviours as a Facilitator, candidates are able to 'see and think about things differently', 'see the relevance of experience' and 'develop reflective practice' which can all be described as developmental effects for candidates of working with an advisor. If an advisor is enabling candidates to 'see and think about things differently' this would be described elsewhere as 'critical thinking'. By 'seeing the relevance of their experience', albeit in relation to the assessment criteria, and 'developing reflective practice' advisors are facilitating development for their candidates.

Candidates also acknowledge that their advisor was an important part of their completion of the process. **Candidate 1** stated that without their advisor they:

'would not have got through the process'

And similarly Candidate 5:

'I really don't think I would have done it without her to be honest'

which indicates the importance that the candidates viewed the role to have in relation to their success.

The process of asking advisors to describe their role in relation to one candidate was similar to advisors asking candidates to describe what they had done in their work. The advisors talking to me had no intention to learn from the process, and as a researcher I had no intention for them to learn from our conversation. So it was interesting to note a comment from **Advisor 1** about the conversation that we had when she described to me her role as an advisor:

'I'm sure other candidates will have said this but it is interesting to reflect and this encourages you to reflect in a way that you otherwise might not choose to do – to think "How does that work? Why do I do that? What have I learned from different candidates?"'

with the implication that adding our conversation to her experience as an advisor made her think about what she had done and gave her the opportunity to learn from the process.

4.4 What learning occurs during the assessment of competence where there is no intention to learn?

There is evidence that learning occurs in the three areas of **propositional**, **process** and **personal** knowledge from a process where there is no intention to learn. In this context propositional

knowledge refers to the body of knowledge relevant to a candidates' profession that underpins their performance; process knowledge refers to the way in which things are done both in their profession and in relation to the assessment of competence as a process; and personal knowledge is that knowledge about self that affects performance, and all of these contribute to the concept of competence. This learning occurs as a result of the combination of the role of written narrative: actually writing the narrative; the written narrative as a tangible product and its actual content; and the role of the advisor in the process as supporter and facilitator. In spite of there being no intention to learn from the assessment of competence process there is evidence that learning occurs under the three headings of **propositional**, **process** and **personal** learning and these will be developed further in this section.

A vital aspect of this research question is the notion that the awarding body did not express learning as an outcome of the assessment of competence, the roles of advisors did not include candidates' learning, and the candidates in this study had 'no intention to learn'. Through considering what the candidates' intentions were for following a particular route it can be established that they had no intention to learn. Their reasons for taking the qualification and motives for choosing a competence assessment route were something other than learning. There are two aspects to this: firstly the candidates' motives for taking the qualification and secondly their motives for choosing this particular route to achieve. The motives for taking the qualification were to do with having, or needing the qualification and what that confers rather than learning from the process. So candidates wanted to obtain the qualification for professional status; credibility with clients; it was a requirement for the job role, or for future roles; with the conclusion that having the qualification would be an advantage. Secondly, in relation to there being 'no intention to learn', there were also reasons that candidates give for specifically choosing an assessment of competence route rather than any other route, which are to do with the construction of the process: that it was quick; it was not college; and that it used work experience that would meet the criteria.

In relation to the first set of motives, an instrumental motive that one candidate disclosed for wanting the qualification was for professional status (**Candidate 4**)

'I've got academic qualifications at the right level for my job but what I don't have , didn't have, is the professional status'

This was similar to the motives noted by **Advisor 3** in relation to his candidates:

'I had quite a few candidates who were directors – they usually just want to get the qualification – they are a bit embarrassed they've not had it before and want to get it'

In addition to this, for **Candidate 2** the motives were twofold

'My motives were not for my own personal development it was purely because I needed credibility for my new business and I needed the letters after my name.'

Here the candidate specifically states that gaining the qualification was not for their development but for professional credibility.

Candidate 7 was moving to a new job role, where they

'needed to become CIPD qualified'

Advisor 3 talked about one particular candidate from Africa, who was different in her intentions from most:

'I never got the impression from her that this was about getting cipd qualification – it was about using the process to get as much as she could out of it and then get the qualification'

He added, in relation to the qualification that:

'I think it's got more kudos for these sorts of countries... getting formal qualifications'

So although he identified one candidate among many, for whom some aspect of learning was a driver, he also recognised that this specific award from the UK was seen to have value by other candidates from the same country.

Interestingly, **Advisor 2** who also had candidates from Africa, commented that

'he really wanted to gain the cipd qualification... and learn a bit more about UK legislation and HR in general. Every time we discussed a different elective he would then need to do a bit of research into what we do in the UK. That's good – he would just go away and do that'

So again, the qualification itself was desired by the candidate, and because foreign candidates not only have to provide evidence of what they have done in their own workplace and country but also show how that differs from what happens here in the UK there was extra propositional knowledge that candidates were expected to demonstrate.

For two candidates their motives were related to prospective employment. **Candidate 1** stated that:

'it was a good idea to have this qualification on my cv'

and **Candidate 4**

'I was doing it for fairly pragmatic ends really. My reason for doing it was the economic climate makes my job a little bit less secure than it was... I felt, obviously from the career point of view, I might be looking for other jobs or promotion'

So for them the qualification was seen as relevant to their future and what could be important to employers. The qualification would mean that they could meet employers' criteria and possibly differentiate them from other applicants.

For the second set of motives that related to the assessment of competence process, there were three candidates (Candidates 1, 2, and 7) who expressed the timeframe for the assessment process as a reason. For example **Candidate 1** stated:

'Ultimately it was a good way for me to do it because it is quick'

For two candidates an alternative to formal attendance and studying were their reasons for this route. **Candidate 1** concluded that:

'Someone in my position you really don't want to go back to college'

where the inference that going to college would be seen as a backward step, inappropriate for a senior manager. The reason that **Candidate 7** stated was

'the fact that there was no formal attendance'

which could be taken to mean a structured programme with prescribed days or evenings at a place of study.

For **Candidate 5** the fact that it is actually assessment of competence that used their own experience was significant:

'So I think for me it was great to be able to use work that I had already done in which I felt that I'd already proved myself to enable me to get the qualification'

Therefore the reasons candidates gave for choosing an assessment of competence route rather than any other route are: that it is quick; it is not college; and it uses work experience that can meet the assessment criteria or standards. The consideration of motives is relevant because none of the candidates stated that their reason for taking this qualification or this route were to learn from it, although some advisors had foreign candidates who not only wanted the award but were using the process to learn about HR in the UK.

4.4.1 Learning from the assessment of competence process

The learning that arises from the assessment of competence process relates to **propositional** knowledge of the candidate's profession; **process** knowledge about the assessment of competence process; and **personal** knowledge about themselves and their own behaviour.

The first instance of learning relates to propositional knowledge in areas of the candidate's own profession and can be seen in underpinning theories and models that relate to the assessment criteria. These are aspects that two candidates acknowledged that they gained specifically as a result

of the assessment of competence process. Candidates may already know about a number of theories or models but they can increase or expand these as a result of this process. One candidate gave this example (**Candidate 2**):

'I learned quite a lot. I expected to go into it thinking 'I know all about it'... and my advisor was quite good here, she would mention all these theories'

There is an overlap here obviously with the role of the advisor, in that in this case it was the advisor who provided the theoretical knowledge. However another candidate described how they prepared for their assessment interview, for example **Candidate 7**:

'So the kind of strategy that I took for the assessment was very much to focus on areas that I thought I was weak in'

Here they have acknowledged that they need to demonstrate a range of knowledge that may go beyond that which they currently use in their work but which is required from the assessment criteria so they needed to demonstrate their knowledge of models and theories to support their experience and work. As was noted earlier when looking at their role, advisors could see that candidates expected them to be knowledgeable and, as **Advisor 1** stated:

'we have experience of HR and they look to us imparting some of that knowledge'

The second type of learning that candidates develop is process knowledge. This was not about the processes that they use in their work roles but refers to knowledge gained from or about the assessment of competence process which they were able to use in another area of their work. This was significant because it showed candidates using different parts of the assessment of competence process and applying them to different aspects of their respective job roles. Two candidates described this further application of knowledge they gain as a result of the assessment of competence process, which might be described as the transfer of learning. From writing narratives, one candidate claimed that this improved their written reports in their own job roles. This was one example of transfer from the assessment process, and specifically the use of written narratives, and was described by **Candidate 4**:

'So with that I did learn something. I wouldn't describe it as conceptual writing but I did learn something and all that writing down of narratives... although I feel I am fairly comfortable with writing and written words and stuff it did make me realise that actually I did use some of that, those phrases, just the facility of putting all those words down on paper – when I next came to do a work report – suddenly all those things came a lot easier. '

'And in doing that I've since realised that actually the way I write reports at work does leave something to be desired.'

Here the candidate has reflected on how writing narratives has helped them to realise improvements that could be made to a similar written format at work. Although this example relates to improving report writing it could also apply to other forms of written work that a candidate needs to produce. Similar improvements in writing could occur from having to write narrative descriptions.

Candidate 7 described the application of a narrative based approach that relates experience to standards which was around using the structure of storyboards and a competence framework with work colleagues.

'I had been looking at how we get a handle on capability for that function and the storyboard format, where you are actually putting together... technical competency framework ... asking our staff and giving them all competency framework based on their role. From our profession map – these are the competencies we expect staff to have. Actually going to get other staff to have similar approach to provide evidence for their competencies in a similar story board approach to our own staff.'

Here the candidate was describing how he was going to get his team to demonstrate their competence in relation to a professional competency framework by producing evidence and writing narratives. This shows that he has developed process knowledge from the assessment of competence process which he has transferred to his work environment as an innovative way of evidencing his team's competence.

The standards as criteria covering process knowledge enabled candidates to review their own organisation's HR policies. In this way they were both applying and acquiring process knowledge.

Advisor 2 explained how for one candidate, the standards:

'helped him in terms of looking at the organisation's processes and being able to contribute to updating them'

In relation to the next area of knowledge that candidates gain from the assessment of competence, personal knowledge, there are three aspects where candidates develop knowledge about themselves and these are: increased self awareness; personal strengths and weaknesses; and their own preferred learning method.

Increased self awareness can enable candidates to see themselves differently, or in a more positive light. One candidate (**Candidate 3**) acknowledged that the realisation of their tacit knowledge increased their confidence and their recognition of themselves specifically as a professional. This

relates back to some of the motives for taking the qualification in the first place which were for gaining professional status and credibility. **Candidate 3** demonstrated this when they stated that

‘to actually collate everything that you are doing, to look at actually what you're doing and that realisation that we are sort of, well I am a professional and I do a professional job’

For those candidates for whom professional status was a motive this could be an important developmental aspect, especially as the assessment of competence process is aimed at people who should already be established as professionals in their discipline, and here it can be seen that the assessment of competence process itself rather than the qualification could enable them to actually recognise themselves as a professional.

The second area of personal knowledge relates to candidates' personal strengths and weaknesses that they are aware of as a result of their assessment of competence. Through reflecting on their experiences three candidates came to realise that this demonstrates things not only that they are good at but also things that they avoid. These three candidates noted various aspects that related to personal strengths and weaknesses that included the following: how to avoid personally difficult situations; working better under time pressure and their need to work to deadlines; and the importance of information storage and their ability to use methods of retrieving that information.

In terms of avoiding personally difficult situations, **Candidate 2** recounted a situation where she found herself quite upset when writing about a particular situation and concluded that:

‘it brought all of that back – in that what it did was made me think I am never, ever going to allow myself to get into that situation again. So it has made me think and be very protective if anyone else might do that. So all of that was very good’

Referring back to the candidates' motives, the timeframe for the assessment process was seen to be an important factor as they wanted to complete quickly and at their own pace. **Candidate 1** recognised, in relation to the assessment of competence process:

‘I liked having the deadline that made it work for me... I needed that push to get things in’

This need for deadlines would probably apply in other aspects of this candidate's work and it could be important that they recognise this issue both in their development activities and in everyday situations at work.

Having to find evidence for what they have done is sometimes an issue for candidates and it does highlight the importance of having good information storage and retrieval systems. The importance

of filing and information retrieval was noted by **Candidate 6** who found it time consuming searching for evidence to support his claim for competence.

'well I'm not the world's greatest filer - and so – well it wasn't that difficult because of the wonders of Google desk top... it forms an index of the contents of your PC and effectively you can search for the word 'Industrial Tribunal' and it will bring up every email and every document that has got that in'

The personal learning from this was that not only did the candidate recognise that he was not good at information storage but most importantly that he had acquired strategies for accessing information to deal with this.

Some of these strengths and weaknesses can also be applied to the differences between candidates in the ways that they prefer to learn, as well as other aspects of their working lives. Candidates will have a different preference for the way in which they learn, and experiencing the assessment of competence route can enable them to recognise what their particular preference is and whether this route is appropriate for them. It may be possible to differentiate between circumstances where there is an intention to learn by considering variables such as: collaborative or independent; one-to-one or one to a group; distant/remote or attendance. One candidate recognised that a collaborative, one-to-one, distant method which could focus on them as an individual was exactly what their preferred method would be, and another preferred a method which was more academic and in more ways similar to traditional post graduate studies.

For **Candidate 6** there was specifically the aspect of working with someone else which they recognised as being important to them. This has been covered to an extent with the role of the advisor, although here it was explicitly expressed as a preference.

'So I probably kind of like the type of collaborative learning. I quite like it when people sit down and work out things together'

Collaboration could be with other students or with an advisor.

Candidate 3 said about the process that:

'it was doing it so distant doesn't suit me'

which was because she wanted the discipline she had felt when studying in a college situation. So for her, in spite of her statement that she

'felt it quite empowering'

And even though she would have preferred a way of studying that was closer to her previous experience she did find this process beneficial.

Candidate 4 referred quite a lot to learning:

'it didn't really feel like the kind of learning process that I'm used to and would get excited and stimulated by'

'I didn't really feel I was learning a great deal from the process. The evidence collecting part of it in particular, I felt at the time was quite physical, and kind of mundane tediousness sort of thing of collecting all the evidence together and putting them in a portfolio. And I thought at the time I don't think – I'm not learning very much from this. So there were some aspects which I questioned myself about what I was actually learning'

However, this candidate acknowledged that she had experienced other processes and preferred them:

'there was an element of "this was not my preferred way of doing things at all". It's a lot more detailed, a lot more structured and a lot less critical and conceptual than I would normally like but actually the fact that I did it was quite satisfying'

Although it is not clear what she meant by the process being more 'detailed and structured' and less 'critical and conceptual' than what she would normally like, it is still worth noting this candidate did express satisfaction with achieving through this route.

What this tells us about learning from the assessment of competence where there is no intention to learn, is that the process was thought to be a positive one by some candidates but not all. What is relevant here is that even for those candidates who did not perceive this to be their preferred route of learning, there was evidence that they still learned something from this process of the assessment of their competence.

4.5 Conclusions and summary of learning that occurs during the assessment of competence where there is no intention to learn

The research question asked what learning occurs as a result of the assessment of competence where there is no intention to learn. There is evidence that **propositional, process** and **personal** learning occurs as a result of the assessment of competence and that this goes beyond the evidence and knowledge requirements from the assessment criteria used in the process.

The motives of candidates for having, or needing the qualification and what that confers: professional status and credibility with clients; a requirement for the job role; or for future roles; can

be related to the learning that takes place in this process. In order to improve their professional status and credibility, **propositional** learning that covers the underpinning theories and models that candidates can obtain can address that need for candidates. **Process** knowledge reflects the skills that candidates can transfer to other situations in their workplace and role. **Personal** learning refers to candidates' increased self awareness; personal strengths and weaknesses; their own preference for learning process and the overall development of critical thinking skills and reflective practice.

These findings are significant because they demonstrate that the learning candidates acknowledge not covers the three areas of **propositional, process and personal knowledge** but goes beyond what is asked for in the assessment of competence process.

The data and the outcomes provide evidence that the role of the advisor as listener and facilitator both encourage and enable candidates to narrate the stories of their work experiences and it is through this articulation that candidates come to acknowledge aspects of their learning. This is in spite of them having no intention to learn from the assessment of their competence, and for the awarding and advisors also having no intention for the candidates to learn from the process. The interface here is between these three factors: the act of telling their stories enables the candidates to reflect on their experience; this happens within a structure given by the standards and assessment criteria; and it is the role that the advisors have in helping the candidates to tell the relevant stories in an appropriate way that helps the candidates to reflect on and acknowledge their learning. This process of bringing narrative structures and the advisory role together in relation to standards and learning that occurs as a result, is neither widely acknowledged as being significant within the competence assessment field of vocational education, nor are the opportunities it presents.

5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will be structured using the research questions by starting with the place of narrative, both written and spoken narrative, where this is considered in its role as a social constructivist mechanism for learning. As well as a focus on spoken narratives prior to their conversion to written narratives, the advisor's role is discussed with the importance that candidates place upon the spoken narrative as well as the advisor's role in the development of written narratives in the assessment process. The role of written narrative in learning from the assessment of competence process will be considered first and then the role of the advisor in learning from the assessment of competence process. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the type of knowledge that candidates claimed during and as a result of their assessment. The emphasis here is on the difference between what was intended to be demonstrated and what was actually claimed as learning.

5.2 The role of narrative in the assessment of competence

The written narratives and their collection into a portfolio of experiences or 'stories' has a role in learning through a number of acknowledged routes: from the process of their production; as an artefact and tangible product; and the role that their content plays in setting the context for the reader.

Genette's (1988) distinction between story, narrating and the narrative itself describes *story* as the actual order of the completed events which form the candidate's experience, *narrating* as the narrative act of the historian which here is the candidate/advisor discussion and *narrative* the product of that act as a written text, a recording or surviving in human memory which from this study is the candidate's written narrative. There are two relevant aspects to consider in this discussion *narrating* as the act of discussion which will be considered in the next section; and *narrative* as the written explanation of the experience.

The process that candidates experienced when writing their narratives, and producing their portfolios of evidence, was effectively a reflective one that incorporated a number of activities and included tools which have been described and applied in processes where there is an intention to learn. It is this combination which encouraged and enabled candidates to learn from this process. Where candidates described a motivating effect of producing a portfolio they are invoking the

aspects of portfolio creation which is similar to those acknowledged by Eraut (1994) in professions. The distinction is that there it is purposeful learning as part of a developmental programme. The motivating effect, evident in my study, came from a combination of the process of writing and the physical effect of seeing the artefact growing. This factor is not recognised explicitly in other studies where the emphasis is on the learning that is shown actually in the written work rather than through the process of writing and creating a portfolio. This act of grasping experiences and evidence and relating experience to the standards and criteria that need to be met, transforms them into written narratives. This is in some ways similar to the processes of experiential learning as outlined by Kolb and Kolb (2005) but again, experiential learning is seen as a deliberate act of sense making of experience in order to facilitate learning rather than a product of the assessment and narrative writing process.

It was important within the assessment process to recognise the need for an individually paced portfolio production process. The ability to accommodate this was a contribution to the overall possibility to learn: because there was an individualised process candidates felt there was the space and time to grasp, reflect on and relate experience to standards as part of the process of writing the narratives. This relates to some aspects of Bruner's (1991) concept of '*narrative diachronicity*', as an aspect of social learning, which can be seen both in the temporal nature of candidates' written narratives, which reflects the occurrence of their experiences over time, but also in the candidates' acknowledgement of the need for an appropriate pace and time for the production of their portfolios.

It is through the manner of reflecting on their work and describing it, that candidates re-engaged with their work in a meaningful way. As candidates created and recreated their portfolios this enhanced the learning process. More than one candidate stated that this process was useful for refreshing their knowledge. Goldsmith (2007) describes a similar effect in relation to the traditional, portfolio building process but there the emphasis is on learning and development where candidates are specifically required to show what they have learned as a result of building their portfolios. Eraut's (1994) tacit knowledge, and Schon's (1983) knowing-in-action, are both reflective processes that can be seen in the process of making tacit knowledge explicit during the assessment of competence although neither refer to learning from an assessment process. Bolton's (2010) work on reflective and reflexive practice relates to written reflection within educational and specifically academic programmes at higher levels. She describes the purposeful nature of reflection for professional development through the reviewing of events or situations to bring them into focus.

There is no reference in her work of starting from standards or criteria and finding situations or experiences to meet those standards. However, the effects of her approach to reflective practice of using *'through the mirror writing'* can be similar to writing narratives to meet standards. She talks about enabling enquiry into, amongst other things, *'what you know but do not know you know'* (Bolton, 2010: 4).

By considering the reader as a different perspective or point of view, candidates added further to the reflective process and this again enabled them to 'grasp and transform' their experience. McDrury and Alterio (2002: 49) discuss, in relation to story tellers and listeners in dialogue, the final stage of storytelling as reconstructing where an ability to interrogate stories critically from as many perspectives as possible can be demonstrated. Although McDrury and Alterio focus on oral storytelling activities, candidates noted that the perspective of the reader was important when writing their narratives and the importance of creating the context for the reader. Bolton (2010: 12) also argues that when students write reflective accounts from a different point of view this can offer *'unwitting layers of subtext for critical review'*.

Written narratives therefore not only have an important role for the candidates themselves but are also deemed important for the readers of their written narratives and portfolios. It is also through the candidates' consideration of the written narrative as 'important' as product or artefact, and the process of reflection that is needed to produce them, that the written narratives have a role in learning from the assessment of competence. Written narratives have a role not only in claims for competence but also as reflective tools and outputs from the assessment process that mediate between the standards and the candidates' learning.

5.3 The Role of the Advisor in the Assessment of Competence

The discussion with an advisor and subsequently the advisor offering feedback on written narratives can be seen as a reflective practice. In this study the reflections, as spoken and written narratives, were elicited in relation to standards being assessed and there was no explicit intention to learn from the process. Bolton's work focuses on critical event narratives with the intention to learn from the reflective process. She considers that reflection is not only a solitary consideration of events outside of oneself, but can be an in-depth consideration *'with critical support'* (Bolton, 2010: 13). Although she is referring to the audience specifically as critics of the reflection, for example fellow students, tutors, patients, or colleagues, to enable learning and development to occur, the process

of reflection and discussion with an advisor in a competence process will similarly involve 'reliving and re-rendering' that experience.

Candidates recognised that their advisor played a vital part in their assessment of competence process and candidates acknowledged that their advisor was an important part of their completion of this process. Social learning is an acknowledged model of development (Bruner,1991; Wertsch 1985), although it is not recognised explicitly in the assessment of competence process where the role of the advisor is seen to be solely that of advising (CIPD, 2006). There is no explicit expectation that the advisor will have a role in helping the candidate to learn from their advice or to help the candidate to learn specifically through the advisory process.

In this study the candidates come from different organisations to a common process with an advisor who they see as acting as coach, mentor or facilitator. Candidates are not part of a learning organisation according to Senge's (1992) definition but are participating in an assessment process. Bolton (2010: 5) states that reflective practice leading to change and development can only happen in learning organisations with the supportive mechanism of coach or mentor. This study showed that the role of advisor was identified as being both a supportive and facilitative one but also that the effect of having an advisor as someone to talk to, discuss the process with, and share stories with, went beyond the espoused role. Through, and as a result of, the different relationships between advisor and candidate, propositional and personal learning occurred.

The role of the advisor was therefore seen in broadly two ways, with respective behaviours for each that had effects and impact on the candidates. Candidates noted propositional knowledge from the advisors' supporting role. It was through a combination of the directive behaviours as a supporter and the more enabling behaviours as a facilitator, that candidates developed aspects of critical thinking. They were able to 'see and think about things differently', 'see the relevance of experience' and 'develop reflective practice' which can all be described as developmental effects for candidates of working with an advisor. These were not specific learning outcomes from an assessment of competence process. If an advisor is enabling candidates to 'see and think about things differently' this would be described elsewhere as 'critical thinking'. By 'seeing the relevance of their experience', albeit in relation to the assessment criteria, and 'developing reflective practice' advisors are facilitating development for their candidates.

5.3.1 The role of the advisor as supporter

Candidates' propositional knowledge developed through the supportive role of their advisor offering theories that related to the topic areas. Although it is not a requirement for advisors to share theories and models with candidates, during their conversations it emerged that there were areas where the advisor shared their knowledge with their candidates. This role is more like that of a mentor similar to the Vygotskian concept (Wertsch, 85) of 'more knowledgeable other' although Vygotsky's work was in relation to children's development. There the teacher more often than not takes on this role rather than adults advising as in the context of this study. Again the concept of 'more knowledgeable other' and that of mentor are both described in the literature in situations where there is an explicit intention to learn.

One candidate commented that their advisor had given them theories in support of their narratives and with reference to the assessment criteria. These theories add to the 'frames of reference' already provided by the assessment criteria and they made judgements about the usefulness of material when they said that these theories had been useful subsequently with their clients. Candidates did describe the role that the advisor took with them as a mentor and, according to the definition offered by CIPD (2011) of mentoring in the workplace (where a more experienced colleague uses their greater knowledge and understanding of work to support the development of an inexperienced member of staff) the advisor's role that candidates acknowledged in the assessment of competence would concur with this.

Involving an advisor in the assessment process gives it the potential to be social learning (Bruner, 1991; Wertsch, 1985). When candidates were finding examples of their experience that constitute a "story" they were demonstrating the '*hermeneutic composability*' referred to as one of the aspects of Bruner's (1991) theory of social learning. By creating their stories and narratives with their advisor candidates' narratives are cumulative, that is, new stories follow from older ones as 'narrative accrual' (ibid). '*Context sensitivity*' and '*negotiability*' are evident through the negotiation about the extent to which the narratives meet the required standards. Candidates' narratives make a claim about how one ought to act which follows from the '*canonicity and breach*' of candidates' work events and can be seen in the standards or assessment criteria as '*normativeness*' (ibid).

In their work McDrury and Alterio (2002: 20) (see Figure 1 Reflective learning through storytelling) describe a stage process of reflective learning through storytelling relating to a learning process which is intentional, has been used in Higher Education and focuses solely on oral storytelling. In my

study candidates were effectively moving from McDrury and Alterio's 'story finding' to the stage of 'story telling' where they focused on organising and ordering content. If, as Josselson (1995) describes, students attempted to make sense both of their own human experience, and the context of their experience they were also linking these to the standards they needed to meet and the advisor was helping them to do this. The emphasis was on making sense of the experience, as story, and relating their story to the standards. The role of standards was not made explicit in the literature.

Whilst not specifically intending to be a reflective process for the intention of learning, the assessment of competence has the effect of being this. By helping candidates to reflect on their experience and helping them to write their narratives, advisors were creating Brophy's 'chronology with causality' (2009: 17) and 'telling it as it is' from the candidates' perspective in relation to standards. Advisors, as more knowledgeable others, helped candidates to grasp and transform their experience in ways that are similar to Kolb and Kolb's (1984: 41) experiential learning. According to Bolton (2010: 31) discussing reflective writings in depth enables outcomes of reflection to be taken back into practice. This could be seen in candidates' proposition learning where knowledge of theories could inform their practice; process knowledge where candidates could apply and acquire processes for improvement; and personal learning about themselves and how they behave at work. Whilst candidates might be able to produce this independently, the advisor took on a role of formative assessor, providing formative feedback in relation to goals and criteria as advocated by Taras (2005) in relation to developmental programmes, discussing and enabling candidates to connect to the assessment criteria (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Torrance and Pryor, 2001).

In their supportive role, advisors enabled candidates to develop primarily aspects of propositional learning and there is an interaction between the supportive and facilitative roles that the advisors adopted with candidates. Advisors moved between directing and enabling roles during their conversations with their candidates.

5.3.2 The role of advisor as facilitator or coach

The role of advisor as facilitator or coach was acknowledged as being one of enabling, rather than directing, and specifically used the behaviours of giving feedback, repeating back (paraphrasing or summarising) and asking questions. The impact of these behaviours was for candidates to see their experiences differently, by reflecting on their experience they could then see the relevance of that

experience to the assessment criteria or standards. It was through these interactions that candidates acknowledged developing their reflective practice.

Candidates stated that it was interesting that many of the things that they had done in their career they did not necessarily, until having the conversations with their advisor, see as being directly relevant to the standards and the process. When they actually talked about them, they could then see how they did connect with what they were trying to demonstrate.

The assessment of competence process, particularly where there is no intention to learn, would not comply with a traditional definition of coaching (CIPD, 2010), as it is not about improving job performance, has no direct relationship to achieving organisational objectives and does not focus on specific work related goals and skills. If we consider the work of Stelter and Law (2010), in their work on narrative-collaborative coaching practice, their definition of an approach to coaching as a reflective space to *'give space for the unfolding of narratives'* would correspond with candidates' views of the role of their advisor. The two central dimensions on which Stelter and Law base their application of coaching are similar to ideas around experiential learning that have been considered previously and focus on the concept of experiential meaning. The actual experiences and implicit, or tacit, knowledge the candidate draws on from their work experience and different life contexts are the way in which they claim that candidates form meaning – or learning as defined in this study.

In this study, in order to create their written narratives candidates acknowledged that their advisors were very important in initially interpreting the standards. Although McDrury and Alterio's (2002) model of learning through storytelling (see Figure 1 Reflective learning through storytelling) can be conceived from the point of view of the narrative as being the key factor, it can also be used to examine the importance of the role of the advisor in enabling candidates to tell their stories – in this way it incorporates the role of the advisor and the role of narrative in the assessment of competence and learning. In their model the students are developing their professional practice and the stories they are encouraged to tell are designed to bring about learning. However, there are neither standards nor very specific assessment criteria for which they are expected to create narratives – and in this way their model differs from the assessment of competence.

Candidates commented that they needed the advisor to help them interpret and make sense of the assessment criteria. Sometimes the standards are written in ways that could be misinterpreted such that the candidates could cite inappropriate experience or could emphasise aspects inappropriately.

The advisors encouraged the candidates to describe experiences or incidents to meet the standards. In this way the first two stages of 'story finding' and 'story telling' in McDrury and Alterio's (2002) model, which correspond to 'noticing' and 'making sense' in Moon's (1999) Map of Learning, are where candidates needed the advisor to help them to notice examples from their own experiences that met the requirements of the standards.

Candidates stated that the advisor acted as a 'guiding hand' and 'practical facilitator' and assisted them in the development of their narratives or storyboards. Another candidate described the advisor as 'making connections' between their experience and the standards and across different assessment criteria. This is where, as part of Moon's 'making meaning' or McDrury and Alterio's 'story expanding' third stage, the candidates make 'reasoned connections' and is the point where candidates would move from surface to deep approaches to learning. Having previously identified the candidates' experiences that are relevant the advisors continued to help the candidates to link these stories across the standards and identify where the narratives and experiences already described will meet other assessment criteria. In one situation where the candidate felt they did not understand what the standards were asking for, their advisor made a connection with the candidate's previous role so that the 'penny dropped'.

Where the advisor and candidate are engaged in forms of reflection, the advisors explored issues via questioning that enabled both the candidate and the advisor to have a deeper understanding of the significance of particular experiences. In the fourth stage 'working with meaning' (Moon, 1999) and 'story processing' (McDrury and Alterio 2002) candidates are stating that the advisor 'encouraged them to think'. It is at this stage that the work of Taras (2005) and the issues of formative assessment are relevant where the advisor is making judgements in relation to assessment criteria and using Ramaprasad's (1983:4) definition of formative feedback as:

'information about the gap between the actual level and the reference level of a system parameter which is used to alter the gap in some way'

The issue for competence candidates is that they need knowledge of the standard or goal, skills in making comparisons, and the development of ways and means for reducing the discrepancy between what is produced and what is aimed for. Feedback to candidates is similar to Sadler's (1989) concept of formative feedback as targeted feedback although he talks about it improving learning efficiently and expediently as part of the goal. Here learning is not the goal but is inevitably an outcome. As Taras (2001) concluded, not only does this feedback enable candidates to see their experience differently and see the relevance of their experience but can increase their motivation,

interest and self value. Feedback given constructively can also give rise to increased self-esteem and an enhanced sense of well being.

Candidates noted the importance of the social context of working with their advisor to enable their learning and the construction of their knowledge. It is also in this stage of story processing that aspects of social learning emphasised by Vygotsky can be recognised. Here we can see acknowledged the importance of language and particularly that of dialogue between the candidate and the advisor. Candidates in this study commented in their interviews that the reflective process was something that they did not find easy and one candidate in particular stated that it was not something they had ever bothered with but that they were made to do it as part of their assessment of competence. They were asked to review their experience and this reflective process did make them think that there were things they could have done better or differently. Even a candidate whose preference was for a less distant approach to learning acknowledged that when their advisor acted as a mentor they were enabled to reflect on their work. This process of social learning and reflection can take place over a number of meetings and the candidate and advisor will be looking at different assessment criteria and connecting different experiences. This will involve more questioning and reflecting to establish the relevance of the experiences to the standards. Although the function of reflection can often be thought of as a solitary developmental process, it has been acknowledged that many people can find this difficult to do. Therefore as a social exercise, reflecting with the assistance of another person can make that function easier and more productive than attempting to do it alone. The practice of reflection is referred to frequently in literature: Taras (2005) talks about students reflecting on feedback; McDrury and Alterio's (2002) model of learning through storytelling in HE is entitled a Model of Reflective Learning and in their stages of 'story expanding' and 'story processing' they talk about the tellers and listeners being reflectively involved and engaged in reflective questioning as well as the role of reflective dialogue; Goldsmith (2007) uses the term reflection to describe a specific aspect of the contents of a student's portfolio; reflection is described as a way to help students reframe their knowledge base (Raelin, 2005); Gray (2007) talks about storytelling as a reflective tool that can be described as a collective act and that reflective tools can be used in collaboration with other people and can be used most effectively away from work precisely because managers have little space at work for reflection; and coaching as a reflective space (Stelter and Law, 2010) can '*give space for the unfolding of narratives*'.

Candidates also experience the stage of reconstructing their stories when they are actually writing their storyboards and during their assessment interview. At the final stage of 'transformative

learning' (Moon 1999) and 'story reconstructing' (McDrury and Alterio 2002) candidates evaluate their own narratives in their written form and receive formative feedback from their advisor. The elements of transformative learning include self awareness, self improvement and empowerment. The personal learning that candidates acknowledged included a greater understanding of themselves as professionals and as learners. For a candidate to comment that the assessment of competence process for them overall had been empowering indicates a degree of personal development that was not intended and self-awareness enabled by the process of narrative production through the mediation of their advisor.

There is an assumption that when the advisor is asking questions, repeating back what the candidate has said and offering feedback, they are focused on the candidates' story rather than their own experiences. Typically in every day conversations there is an exchange of experiences as an important part of the dialogue. However in this environment the emphasis is on the candidate and the condition of McDrury and Alterio's (2002) 'response discourse' is achieved where the listener adds an extra dimension, which through reflective dialogue develops multiple perspectives of events. This reflective dialogue is associated with a deep approach to learning and it was noted that the questions that the advisors asked were important and could then influence what the tellers could choose to tell, and through this could enable the tellers themselves to see things differently.

Candidates commented that through conversations with their advisors they could see the relevance of their experiences and through this collaborative reflection could connect their experience to the standards they needed to meet. Where advisors were asking questions and giving feedback they were giving candidates the opportunity to see their experience from a different point of view or different version of reality through narratives which represent their story of their experience. Bruner's (1991) notion of 'referentiality', as a component of social learning, can be seen in candidates' narratives as versions of reality. These versions or perspectives can change as a result of the candidate's dialogue with their advisor where they can create a narrative version of verisimilitude. So as well as creating a version to meet the standards candidates can be creating an alternative perspective as a result of the discussion with their advisor. Candidates assimilate new information from the discussions with their advisors and this is accommodated into existing schema.

Much has been written about ways to develop reflective practice: Gray (2007) elaborates on the sort of storytelling candidates participate in with their advisors as a reflective and collective act. It is

through dialogue that meanings have to be made explicit for the version of the story to be understood.

The process of social learning, through the facilitation of an advisor asking questions, reflecting back what the candidate has said and giving feedback, leads to candidates experiencing elements of personal learning rather than process or propositional learning. Personal learning is conceived as learning about self and encompasses the acknowledged aspects of improved reflective practice.

Being able to view their own experiences differently, through the processes of storytelling and dialogue, and in relation to the external mediation of the assessment criteria, is an example of developing critical thinking (Facione, 1990). This example of the development of a skill, as a result of reflection on their own experience in relation to standards or assessment criteria, demonstrates the effect that storytelling dialogue with an advisor can have. This is an example of the personal learning that can occur as a result of the assessment of competence where there is dialogue between the candidate and an advisor working in a facilitative way.

The role of the advisor is therefore evident in two forms: as a mentor in a supportive and directive role as a 'more knowledgeable other' (Wertsch, 1985), and as a coach in a facilitative and enabling role (CIPD, 2011). Through discussion with, and formative feedback from an advisor (in relation to the requirements of the assessment criteria), candidates relive and re-render their work experience. Candidates acknowledged propositional, process and personal learning as a result of their advisor's support and facilitation.

5.4 Conclusions and summary of learning that occurs from the assessment of competence where there is no Intention to Learn

The research question asked what learning occurs as a result of the assessment of competence where there is no intention to learn. There is evidence that propositional, process and personal learning occurs as a result of the assessment of competence and that this goes beyond the evidence and knowledge requirements from the assessment criteria used in the process.

The motives of candidates for having, or needing the qualification and what that confers: professional status and credibility with clients; a requirement for the job role; or for future roles; can be related to the learning that takes place in this process. In order to improve their professional status and credibility, propositional learning that covers the underpinning theories and models that

candidates can obtain can address that need for candidates. Process knowledge reflects the skills that candidates can transfer to other situations in their workplace and role. Personal learning refers to candidates' increased self awareness; personal strengths and weaknesses; their own preferences for different learning processes and the overall development of critical thinking skills and reflective practice.

These findings are significant because they demonstrate that the learning which candidates acknowledge not only covers the three areas of **propositional, process** and **personal knowledge** but goes beyond what is asked for in the assessment of competence process.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

It may seem obvious to assessment practitioners that candidates should learn from a process where their competence is assessed and where reflection on work experience is a key element. In most cases of the assessment of competence, assessing learning is an explicit part of the process. The PAC process offered an opportunity to demonstrate that when there is no intention - or necessity - to learn, candidates do claim that learning occurs. This chapter outlines the conclusions drawn from this study; limitations of the research; implications for future practice and possible future research.

Where there are assumptions about assessment processes such as this, learning can be taken for granted. What emerged from this study was that the interactions between the elements of the assessment of competence - the components of standards to be met, spoken and written narrative - were all found to contribute to the process of learning regardless of intention to learn. Of course learning can take place in other situations with each of these elements occurring independently, but having these all of these aspects interacting enabled a deep approach to learning, as defined by Entwistle (1996), to occur through the medium of storytelling or narrative.

When an awarding body says of its assessment process that it is

'a way into membership that doesn't require enrolment on an extended, educational or traditional developmental route' (CIPD, 2006)

it is missing a significant opportunity to acknowledge the potential for learning from the process itself. By focusing on the expedient advantages of the approach it is effectively ignoring the development that candidates can obtain from pursuing the assessment of their competence. Candidates, being persuaded of the opportunity to obtain the award and membership can themselves also be blind to the learning that could arise from the assessment process and just see this as quick route to entry.

It was clear in this study that candidates pursued this route to membership precisely because it met their expressed motives for having, or needing the qualification and what that conferred: professional status and credibility with clients; a requirement for the job role; or was a requirement for future roles. Candidates stated that they wanted something that was quick, that they did not want to go to college to learn, and they wanted to be able to use their experiences and what they had already produced at work to obtain the award – even to the point of stating that their motives

were specifically not for personal development. Advisors also acknowledged that candidates were pursuing this route for the outcome rather than for what development might happen during the process.

Much of the literature relating to informal learning in its various descriptions is focused on situations where there is an intention to improve the learning that could take place. Elements of non-formal learning such as implicit, reactive and deliberative learning emphasise learning at work and for work. The concepts around non-formal learning, informal learning, incidental learning and unintended consequences have been defined mostly in relation to learning in and from the workplace rather than in a competence assessment process. However, there are some useful elements that can be applied to an assessment process when there is no intention to learn. The processes by which candidates learn from their assessment of competence that are referred to in these models include the systematic nature and degree of formality of competence assessment, using standards and assessment criteria, and having planned meetings, but the lack of intentionality is the significant factor that relates to the unintended outcome of learning.

The advisors' stated key roles are not expressed as acting as coach or mentor to help candidates to learn anything from the assessment process but are to support the candidate in preparing and presenting their portfolio; to make formative assessment decisions about the candidate's performance and their knowledge and understanding; and how the requirements of the CIPD standards are to be met (CIPD, 2006). These were precisely the roles that the advisors described and concur with the awarding body and candidates' views of the assessment process with the focus on the process of achieving the award.

Although the awarding body, the candidates and the advisors were not intending for learning to arise from the assessment of competence process, with the support of their advisor candidates can move through the stages of Moon's (1999) Map of Learning, McDrury and Alterio's (2002) Stages of Learning through Storytelling and from a surface to a deep approach to learning. Reaching a stage of 'transformative learning' (Moon, 1999), or McDrury and Alterio's (2002) 'story reconstructing,' learners' capacity is characterised by being able to take a critical overview of knowledge and their own knowledge and functioning in relation to it. Unintended learning should not be a surprise output from the competence assessment process: learning will occur despite the focus on the assessment of learning and despite there being no formal acknowledgement of assessment for learning. Because the process includes re-engagement with work experiences, written and spoken

reflective processes, a deep approach to learning can ensue as seen in the candidates' propositional, process and personal learning that goes beyond the requirements of the standards. The potential for learning from the competence assessments deserves greater recognition by the awarding body, candidates and advisors.

By adopting a social constructivist framework and a narrative approach to social learning theory, I took the stance that learning occurs when there are certain conditions as outlined by Vygotsky and developed by, for example, Bruner (1991) and Wertsch (1985). Significantly, relevant concepts associated with this are that there is a role for a more knowledgeable other, as characterised here by the advisor; and that the candidate is operating within their zone of proximal development where learning is facilitated by the advisor. This approach does not seem to have been applied previously to formal assessment situations where there is no intention to learn: typically social constructivism looks at the assessment in teaching and learning situations and how the teacher and learner interact to enable learning, and how to encourage learning for example through experiential processes (Kolb and Kolb, 2005).

By construing knowledge in terms of **propositional**, **process** and **personal** it was possible to distinguish the types of learning that took place in the assessment of competence and to relate these to what the candidates were required to demonstrate from the standards. This typology of learning and knowledge offered a tool for description, and analysis, of what is learned. By drawing on a range of theories from a social constructivist perspective, it was possible to bring together ideas to describe the learning, to enable the analysis of the data and to draw reasonable conclusions. Theories that describe storytelling as reflection (McDrury and Alterio, 2002) in the field of HE, as intentional learning processes, map successfully onto the assessment of competence process. What was significant from this study therefore was the social constructivist and narrative inquiry approach to analysing a situation where learning was not intended but did occur; the development and application of a typology of learning/knowledge; and the combination of elements that enabled learning to take place in these circumstances: namely the need to meet standards and the use of written and spoken narratives.

There are other structurally similar situations where explicitly considering this format of written narrative and spoken narrative with an advisor applying of a set of standards, as an enabling and learning process, could improve how they are conducted and could lead to benefits for processes and candidates' learning. The value of this research is that it demonstrates the nature of learning

that occurs during the assessment of competence process, and there is potential for how this can be translated to other similar situations both where there is, and where there is not, the intention to learn.

6.2 Research Questions Answered

Each of the three research questions asked in this study will be considered in turn. The first research question was:

- What is the role of narrative in the assessment of competence?

The written narrative is important in the assessment of competence process, where candidates explain how their experience meets the standards, as it can motivate candidates both when they see their portfolio growing but also as they realise what they have actually achieved as professionals. By employing written reflective practice, candidates are essentially sense making and transforming their knowledge from tacit to explicit.

Written narratives have an important role for the candidates themselves but candidates also see it to be important to consider those who will read them and to think about the content from the reader's perspective. It is also through the candidates' consideration of the written narrative as 'important' as product or artefact - and the process of reflection that is needed to produce them - that the written narratives have a role in learning from the assessment of competence. Written narratives have a role not only in claims for competence but also as reflective tools and outputs from the assessment process that mediate between the standards and the candidates' learning. The written narratives are the result of candidates' reflection on and reconstruction of their work experiences, in relation to standards, enabling them to move from sense making to transformative learning, to use the terms coined by Moon (1999) in relation to deliberate, intentional learning.

The second research question was:

- What is the role of the advisor in the assessment of competence?

The advisor's role is important in terms of response discourse and enabling learning conversations in a situation where there is no intention to learn. Candidates' reflections, as spoken and written narratives, were elicited in relation to standards being assessed. Through this discourse advisors

offer an extra dimension to the candidates' independent reflections by interpreting the standards; making connections between the standards and the candidates' work experience; and giving formative feedback. In the assessment of competence process, the advisor can be both supportive and directive in a manner similar to a mentor and acting as the '*more knowledgeable other*', as well as facilitative and enabling the candidates to work within and towards their '*zone of proximal development*' similar to that of a coach. Both coach and mentor are roles where there is an intention to learn (CIPD, 2011). The role of the advisor incorporates reflection and social learning: through helping candidates to make meaning of their experiences and expanding their stories candidates move from surface to deep approaches to learning as defined by Entwistle (1996).

The third research question was:

- What learning occurs during the assessment of competence where there is no intention to learn?

Candidates' motives for pursuing this route of competence assessment were: professional status and credibility with clients; a requirement for their current job role; or for future roles. None stated that they were taking this route because they wanted to learn in terms of propositional, process or personal learning. The results indicated that, as an outcome of the written narrative element of portfolio building, and having an advisor as mentor and coach, candidates did learn in all three areas. Not only did candidates claim this learning, but it went beyond what they were expected to demonstrate in their assessment of competence. The motives of candidates can be related to the learning that takes place in this process. In order to improve their professional status and credibility, propositional learning that covers the underpinning theories and models that candidates can obtain can address that need for candidates. Process knowledge reflects the skills that candidates can transfer to other situations in their workplace and role. Personal learning refers to candidates' increased self awareness; personal strengths and weaknesses; their own preferences for different learning processes and the overall development of critical thinking skills and reflective practice

6.3 Limitations of the research

Some of the limitations to this study are those common to all research using qualitative approaches and data. Using a constructivist approach means that the findings from this study are '*viewed as relative to time and place and therefore never absolute. Thus they cannot be generalised*' (Patton, 2002: 100). However a small amount of generalisation can be achieved by considering the key

factors that contributed to learning which can be applied describing the types of knowledge that candidates evidenced from the assessment of their competence.

In using a convenience sample of self selected volunteer candidates there was no claim that this was a representative sample of the entire population of candidates. An initial concern of mine was using a small sample of candidates from only one assessment centre, who volunteered, and whether this would be seen as giving rise to sampling bias. However, as the intention was to examine the type of learning that occurs from the process, the source of candidates was not deemed to be relevant as it was their experience of the process that was important. That only those candidates who had volunteered were included was not relevant for similar reasons. It was not the representation of a range of candidates that was needed, but their experience of the process and disclosure of learning as a result of it. What is relevant and significant from this study is that, within this relatively small sample, there was evidence of all three types of learning.

There was the possibility that because candidates were not asked specifically what they had learned, evidence of that might not be forthcoming in my interviews with them. This was unfounded as there were examples of candidates learning that went beyond what was required in the standards in their conversations and storyboards. Another issue could have been that the semi-structured interviews I conducted were another example of candidates reliving their assessment process - adding a further layer of reflection that was not in place for other candidates. However any form of investigation would have done this. By not asking questions about learning in the investigation, the specific reflection on learning was avoided and the emphasis was on the candidates' experience of the process. Additionally, in the analysis there was a potential threat to the external validity, or generalisability, by expanding on the examples that candidates gave. The presence of confirmatory bias has to be acknowledged as I was looking for examples of learning to confirm my hypothesis, based on my previous experience of ad hoc candidate comments that they did learn from the process. The rigour of analysis should be sufficient to counter that claim.

As an insider researcher (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005) I was aware of my levels of pre-understanding of the PAC process. My dual roles as advisor and researcher helped rather than hindered the research as I was able to readily understand the experiences that candidates were describing. None of the candidates knew me although they did know that I worked for the organisation through which they had completed their PAC. There was not an issue of organisational politics due to the permission I was given for my research and my continuing role in the organisation as a consultant.

6.4 Implications for practice

There are potential implications for practice in structurally similar situations where there is no intention to learn, as well as where there is that intention. The role of written narrative is important as a means to enable reflection particularly where there are standards or competences to be met. The development of a portfolio as an artefact, symbolic of what the candidate has achieved can act as a motivator for some. Realising what they have achieved at work through written reflection is an act of sense making that can lead to learning in the area of process knowledge.

An advisor acting in a social constructivist role as a mentor can direct candidates to propositional knowledge and as a coach can facilitate understanding of the connections between the standards and experience. Formative feedback can enable the transition from surface to deep approaches to learning. This learning can be personal and lead to improved critical thinking skills as well as increased self awareness, motivation and self esteem.

There are several other structurally similar situations - but where there is an intention to learn - where there are written narratives and the presence of an advisor, which could be replicated and acknowledged to enable further learning. These include: assessment of competence where there is an intention to learn; academic tutorials; work supervision and appraisals; assessment and development centres; mentoring and coaching.

The first of these situations could be the assessment of competence where there is an intention to learn, such as with NVQs. With this qualification and form of assessment, there are standards or assessment criteria to be met, each candidate should have an advisor but there may not be a requirement for written narratives to describe how the evidence meets the standards. Candidates are expected to demonstrate their knowledge - which could be propositional, process and personal depending on the content and construction of the standards - as delivered as part of their programme of learning. There is no explicit declaration or intention to acknowledge learning that candidates acquire as a result of the actual assessment process rather than through their development programme. This is the situation that is most similar structurally to the PAC process. There is not always a requirement for written narratives, sometimes there is only a spoken explanation of the evidence. Given the finding from this study of the importance of the relationship between standards and the written and spoken narrative, this could be made more explicit as a purposeful reflective process, as well as giving the narrative processes a greater focus to capture that learning.

In academic tutorials there are usually learning criteria to be achieved and often a written submission. Although candidates do not necessarily reflect on their work experience, the tutor acts as an advisor and should be directing the student and giving feedback to meet the assessment criteria. Tutors should also be enabling students to reflect on their work through questioning and listening. In this study it was identified that the written narrative enabled learning that went from sense making to transformative learning, and in the spoken narrative learning that went from noticing to story expanding. The storytelling steps in the academic tutorial relationship could be made part of the tutorial process to enable candidates to reflect more and facilitate the move from surface to deep approaches to learning.

In many work situations managers and employees participate in regular supervision and appraisal discussions. These are reflective situations, reviewing performance from the previous month or year. There is an implied intention to learn from them, as they are usually considering work activities from which a development plan will be produced. They are similar to the assessment of competence process as there is some element of written narrative and discussion during the meeting. Some organisations use technical and behavioural competences as part of the basis of these discussions. In both situations the manager could be taking on the role of advisor and supporting the employee - through directed feedback - to reflect on, re-live and re-render their experience in relation to standards of competence, work related objectives or targets. Usually, however, this reflection is done independently and then discussed at the meeting. There is an implication within these processes that the employees will work towards new objectives or targets, for the short or long term, and consider what learning they may need to undertake in order to achieve these objectives. There is an implied intention to consider mainly propositional and process learning needs although personal learning needs may also be discussed particularly in relation to behavioural competences. These types of knowledge could be made explicit as process or personal competences and a specific reflection on the appraisal or supervision itself could be used to capture learning from these processes.

Assessment and Development Centres (ADC) are used by organisations as assessment for selection for employment or promotion, and development following these events or just for determining development needs. These centres are usually based on the competences needed for the job role or position. Candidates will not usually have an advisor prior to the event but given the importance of the discourse with an advisor in terms of learning, this could be a development and enhancement particularly where candidates' development is the desired outcome and where they will be assessed

against standards, assessment criteria or competences. Following an ADC, candidates should receive feedback from an assessor, focusing on their performance in the ADC in relation to the requirements. This feedback is similar to that from an advisor in the PAC context. As this study showed the importance of written narratives, a possible way to enhance candidates' learning from an ADC would be to encourage them to write down their explanation of how their performance at the event met the assessment criteria before they get feedback - and then to compare their views with those of their assessor. From this they could collaboratively produce a personal development plan.

This study showed the importance of having standards of competence and written narratives: and these could be included in mentoring and coaching. Mentoring is a developmental activity for a candidate where the mentor acts in the same way as the PAC advisor by giving direction and support and sharing their knowledge. As this study also showed the relevance of having standards of competence to meet, mentoring could be improved by having clear objectives to achieve - these may relate to external standards or competences. As with an ADC, the candidate could write accounts of their work experience and how they have worked towards achieving goals. Again the discussion with the mentor would be important where mentors use the skills that are needed to support and direct their candidates. As a coach should act in a facilitative, enabling way this mirrors the actions attributed to the PAC advisor. Coaching could be enhanced by referring to external standards or competences and encouraging candidates to produce written narratives of the areas that they want to bring to coaching and how these differ when they have introduced new ways of working.

This study represents the application of social learning concepts as an enhancement to reflective learning processes and practices, through the uses of written and spoken narrative, which could be added to the existing repertoire of reflective practice materials and offer further practical ways of learning from experience.

The distinction between types of knowledge and learning using the designation of the three Ps - propositional, process and personal - was very useful during the analysis of the data in this study. This could be similarly helpful in many other applications. I have used it with students and candidates in circumstances such as action learning sets, tutorials, reflection on learning and developing training materials, where it has seemed to be a readily understood idea and helpful

distinction. It has helped individuals to comprehend their own learning and helped trainers to think about how they designate the learning that they are expected to facilitate in their training.

6.5 Future research questions

The following are suggestions for possible future research questions building on the findings from this study and the possible areas of application.

The finding that producing a portfolio was itself a motivator, through actually creating written narratives and through seeing the portfolio developing as a tangible product can be further explored in different contexts. To what extent the production of a portfolio of evidence and written narrative acts as a motivator to complete in assessments where there is an explicit intention to learn could be explored, as well as its contribution to learning.

There was a recognition that reflection occurred in this study, through the role of the advisor acting as a coach fulfilling a facilitative role and enabling response discourse. This aspect could also be considered in situations where there is an intention to learn in a traditional assessment of competence situation, and the extent to which this form of reflection on written and spoken narrative enables learning.

The steps or stages through which candidates progress in their assessment of competence has been related to the steps in an explicit storytelling approach (McDrury and Alterio, 2002) and a map of learning (Moon 1999). This is not acknowledged in assessment situations, so would making the process explicit enable the transition from surface to deep approaches to learning? An application of this could be in academic tutorials acknowledging explicit storytelling steps with the tutor.

The model of propositional, process and personal knowledge and learning has been used throughout this study and could have applications in different circumstances. For example: how effective is the application of the designation of knowledge and learning (propositional, process and personal) in helping candidates to understand their own learning needs and achievements in different contexts? This could be explored in different situations, such as in supervision or appraisal, where there is an opportunity to reflect on competences and also to use the structure of the three Ps and the extent to which this enables learning could be considered.

The importance of standards, assessment criteria or competences against which candidates produce their written narratives and discuss with their advisor was evident in this study. There are circumstances where there is the possibility to use competences and written reflective narratives based on competences to lead to enhanced learning, such as during mentoring and coaching situations. The combination of standards or competences and assessment can also be seen within the context of an ADC. Written reflections on their own performance at the centre could be a way of enhancing candidates learning and this could lead to contributions to their personal development plan which is another area that could be explored as an enhancement of learning whether the centre is for assessment or for development.

These research questions would demonstrate the applicability of the results of this study in situations where there is, and is not, an intention to learn and extend the learning into other areas.

7 Reflections

7.1 Introduction

As a large part of this research has been concerned with the reflective nature of narrative my reflection on this study will draw on a number of the issues raised. I will use the three aspects of knowledge used in my analysis to review my learning from the process of research and writing this thesis.

7.2 Propositional learning

Of all the storytelling literature I encountered, the work of McDrury and Alterio (2002), in relation to Higher Education, was most relevant for me as this is the level at which my study was carried out and the level of students with whom I usually work. I favour models such as theirs with a clear structure and where I can see that there has been robust examination of the issues. Their study in its linear format and the links with Moon's (1999) reflective practice and Entwistle's (1996) surface and deep approaches to learning, combined concepts that resonated with so many of my areas of work. I easily related their ideas to tutorials that I conduct, as well as being supervised for this thesis. Even though I do not have a traditional job role: being self employed I effectively am self managed as I do not have performance reviews with any of the employing organisations for whom I work as an associate. I am not supervised and do not have an appraisal or development review, but I could see the relevance of written and spoken narrative in all of these areas. My work, however, is with managers for whom these activities should be an important part of their people management role. I was able to see the relevance of a learning conversation approach for students and tutors, employees and managers, and in other areas of my work such as coaching and assessment centres, as well as the assessment of competence.

I would like to develop a model or structure of learning conversation, based around the model from McDrury and Alterio (2002: 60) that could be used in a variety of situations to enable candidates to learn from their experiences through using a range of explicit narrative processes. Figure 1, which integrates Moon's Map of Learning, McDrury and Alterio's Learning through Storytelling and Entwistle's (1996) surface to deep approaches to learning, could be developed with more specific actions, such as typical questions or reflective activities, aligned to the process of a learning conversation.

Taras's (2005) work on feedback was also a key piece for me as I believe feedback is valuable and relevant in not only understanding performance but also in relationship and personal development. Feedback to candidates in the form of facilitative questions, as well as support for their stories, would form a significant element of the learning conversation process and could also bring in Ramaprasad's 'reference level of the system parameter' (1983: 4) by way of standards or criteria. Feedback with reference to external standards or criteria gives an informational framework for the advisor, assessor, tutor or manager to work within.

There initially seemed to be little work in relation to studying the impact of APL and RPL, but there have been more studies undertaken recently in countries such as South Africa and the Netherlands. It seems that there is a wealth of data and research which has not been reviewed and applied in current assessment literature aimed at advisors and which could be developed further. Rather than a 'poor relation' there is an opportunity to value candidates' experiences and to explore through narratives what these mean in terms of learning that can be accredited.

As a psychologist I valued reading again about social learning theory and determining how this related to my study. It is important to me to have a reference base for the development work that I do with managers to give it credibility. By examining research and recent works discussing and applying the work of Vygotsky I have been able to use this in my work with students when we review their learning opportunities and application of experiential learning concepts.

7.3 Process learning

I am a very experienced interviewer for selection purposes and for assessment. Both of these situations are based on candidates demonstrating that they have met criteria – either for a job role or for a qualification as in this study. In neither of these processes is there an explicit intention for candidates to learn from their assessment. Having conducted this study, I can see that there is an opportunity for candidates, through support and written and spoken narratives, for a deeper approach to learning to be taken.

The interviews I am used to conducting are either structured or semi-structured, so using a narrative approach and asking candidates just to tell me about their experiences in an unstructured form was quite novel to me. I found the process very interesting firstly for the amount of information candidates were prepared to disclose, which was sometimes quite personal information, and then even though I did not specifically ask for examples of learning, these were evident in their accounts.

The activity of writing this thesis was one of the most difficult things for me. I supervise Masters level students but writing at this level was much harder than I had imagined and consequently took me much longer than I had anticipated. Writing to meet PhD requirements for me could have been more straightforward if there had been clearer, more precise criteria and standards to meet. My discussions with my supervisor often left me feeling that I was unsure what was required and whether I could produce something that would be satisfactory. This echoes my preference for an organised composition but also my lack of confidence about writing.

In terms of feedback on my work, I need to review the comments that I have had and look for examples of strengths in my writing. I need to seek more feedback if I want to progress to writing for publication, so I need to consider what I would like to write and where this is likely to be published.

7.4 Personal learning

I have experienced the value of conversation as a learning method, through the evidence from the candidates I have assessed, those I listened to in this study and through the conversations with my supervisor. In areas outside of my study, around consensus decision making in groups, I have seen difficult situations be resolved when people have space and time to discuss their issues. In these situations, there is an opportunity to reflect on and learn from the process of spoken narrative.

As an aspect of learning about myself – my preference for structure is not new. I should perhaps have been more explicit and asked for clearer criteria to write to. I was disappointed that it took me 18 months from thinking that I had completed my thesis to actually having a draft that was satisfactory. I have to continue to review what I have gained from completing this and what I have added and can further add to the body of knowledge.

My resilience and stamina to complete this comes from the challenge I set myself. I have done this to demonstrate that I can achieve at this level and the personal satisfaction of doing this thesis. The learning which this study has brought me, although initially intended for my own benefit, is something that I want to share with others and it is through the dissemination of my findings that I will achieve that greater potential value.

7.5 Conclusions

I have considered what I would do differently if I was doing this study and thesis over again. Whilst I would have liked to be able to focus just on this for a concentrated period of time and think that I could have completed this more quickly, I do not think that was feasible with my personal circumstances. I am self employed and I had children to support (and my mother for the first two years of my study) so I do not think that would have changed.

I think now that taking this amount of time has been beneficial and has helped me to reflect on many aspects of the assessment of competence and to produce a respectable thesis. I do not think I could have done this if I had worked to a shorter timescale. The breadth and depth of reading done for a thesis is not apparent in the final document. I have a much more critical view when reading now, having read and rejected so much that has been written in this area, and I am using that critical view when researching evidence to use in my teaching and when assessing my students. My writing has improved and, as I have noted, I need to apply this improvement to writing for a wider audience.

The application of my learning from this study can be seen in the areas of future research I have noted. I have summarised this into the following questions which I will consider in my work and future research:

To what extent does the production of a portfolio of evidence and written narrative act as a motivator to complete in assessments where there is an intention to learn? How does this contribute to learning?

In a traditional assessment of competence situation, where there is an intention to learn, to what extent could reflection on written and spoken narrative enable learning?

In academic tutorials, would the acknowledgement of explicit storytelling steps with the tutor enable the move from surface to deep learning?

To what extent could reflection on competences, and the application of the three Ps to competences, enable learning from a supervision or appraisal?

Within the context of an ADC, how effective could written reflections on their own performance at the centre be at enhancing candidates learning and contributions to a personal development plan?

Could the use of competences and written narratives lead to enhanced learning during mentoring and coaching situations?

How effective could the application of the designation of knowledge and learning (propositional, process and personal) be in helping candidates to understand their own learning needs and achievements in different contexts?

These questions demonstrate the application of my work and the extent of the research which I can consider and achieve alongside my day to day work. These questions indicate the research that I still want to conduct and which I can carry out during my current and planned work. I will continue to reflect in formal and informal ways on my findings and I will develop further as I assess candidates and have learning conversations with candidates in different contexts.

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Appendix 1

Candidate 3 Interview transcription

26.1.10

Jan	So just talk to me and tell me about your experience of PAC.
C 3	OK well I am a bit embarrassed really as I must have been one of the longest clients. We decided to do the PAC assessment because our boss had died at 39. She had a stroke in the office and then died 2 weeks later and it was all a bit of a shock
Jan	Oh yes
C 3	and one of the things she'd said to me and my friend was you must make sure you do your CIPD. There was an interim head – and as there was funding available we would both sign up for it. Which in one way was really good as it was something Tina had pushed us both to do it but on the other hand it was the fact that we had no Head of Service so we were both acting up and so the 12 week time span slipped considerably because we just didn't have ... it was all hands on deck job wise and then trying to get your assessments done at the same time was really difficult. But on the other hand the situation that we had where there was a few people I suppose taking advantage of the situation with no formal Head of Service and trying to push certain issues through. And a colleague who had had bereavements in the past, when Tina died, because she was older than our boss she flipped out basically and so although it meant we were covering for another position there was lots of fairly nasty stuff going on it was actually quite nice to go to the PAC assessment because A was really supportive and actually reinforced what we were doing and it was quite – it was also some transactional analysis you were going like the small child and she was being very supportive parent – do you realise the amount of work that you are doing and the changes that you are making. From that point of view I found that really valuable. And so for me the downside was although it was good that we had the funding and we had to do it then the timing was bad – we were covering for someone who was off sick, our boss had dies and then trying to collect evidence at the same time was quite difficult. And then obviously we got a new boss and when someone new comes in you've got to... because you are not going to college and you haven't got to do assignments by a certain date so its good that it's flexible in that way and I could do that next week but also quite easy for us to go 'got a new boss' so could make an excuse – quite easy to park it. Then actually it's 3 weeks and oh my god it's 4 weeks so I don't think that would normally be a problem necessarily if I signed up for it now and had the Head of Service who I've got now because she would be pushing me But when you've got nobody above you and you are covering for lots of positions it is easier to think I've not got to see A for another 5 weeks so I'll do that a few days before.
Jan	When did you actually start on the programme?
C 3	Two years ago
Jan	Right, gosh, yes.
C 3	It was all a bit bizarre because T died then we had this interim Head in and we had the

	<p>funding then my colleague S who I was doing the PAC with she left and so there was new team members coming in and I was the longest serving member of the team and at 38 I was the oldest so I was doing my job plus I training them. It was just lots happened but then that's a really good excuse to put off things</p>
Jan	<p>Yes – because there is always stuff happening and there is always things going on that you could ... there is never a quiet time is there?</p>
C 3	<p>No but that's why I left it so late doing my CIPD. My other job is I am a counsellor and play therapist so I was doing my training for that and when that finished you just went straight into the next thing. I managed to finish one of my Diplomas – well I actually went to college on the day my little boy was due. So it is not as if that was a problem. But because you were going to college again it was giving me that bit more discipline. Because to be fair that is the thing I struggled with the PAC.</p>
Jan	<p>Ok yes it is interesting to contrast it with other programmes just to see the advantages and disadvantages of both of them which obviously they have got.</p>
C 3	<p>I mean ... I haven't done, I can't even think. I've done NVQs before but not for years so to go back to doing ... you know collecting evidence and assessments was a bit different for me as I haven't done that for quite a long while.</p>
Jan	<p>So you say you've done NVQ s before</p>
C 3	<p>Yes when I used to work at a college they used to get you to do those all the time really</p>
Jan	<p>Right ok. Tell me about the actual portfolio building process.</p>
C 3	<p>Yes well I found the Training and Development a lot easier and I actually ... well they're a bit like NVQs aren't they, some of the language ...</p>
Jan	<p>Yes</p>
C 3	<p>... you're not quite sure what they are getting at here. Obviously when we sat down and spoke to A she explained and that kind of made sense. But as I say I didn't realise ... the one I was most frightened of was, which I probably did the easiest was Employee</p>
Jan	<p>Relations – and a lot of that again was my own confidence with my colleagues saying</p>
C 3	<p>'You're not CIPD' all the time so I was thinking it was like I was playing at it and it was quite good to think actually I do actually know what I am talking about because I was bringing evidence and 'Oh God you've done this and you've done that' and I found that just really good for confidence wise.</p>
Jan	<p>Yes...so you say it was people at work who were saying that?</p>
C 3	<p>Yeah – the lady who lost it when our boss died she was a nightmare, and that was always her way of pulling rank was if there was a debate or whatever that was always her point 'Well actually you're not CIPD'</p>
Jan	<p>Oooh yes ...</p>
C 3	<p>and um she was a bit of a... just unfortunately it wasn't very good for everybody and for</p>

	<p>an HR person to have the personality that she had but when you're in an environment where there's lots going on and someone's trying to undermine you all the time it was actually excellent to go to London to Victoria and to have A ... and also from my point of view I've got the ... quite a generalist role and because we've only got 350 staff one of my roles is I look after the Employee Relations for Directorate based on another site to where I am and then I look after Members' training because I work for a Local Authority and I look after corporate training</p>
Jan	<p>Right yes</p>
C 3	<p>And that was quite nice really because it meant I could dip into the different areas and I had a bit more of a choice of which assessments to do. And again just reinforced that actually it was quite good platform where I work because obviously I used to work at a County Council but there you are either strategic HR or Policy of Training whereas we still get the choice to do a bit of everything.</p>
Jan	<p>Like you said a generalist role. So which electives did you do? You said you did Employee Relations.</p>
C 3	<p>I did and I did a training one</p>
Jan	<p>Was it D&D training?</p>
C 3	<p>No it was an actual management bit</p>
Jan	<p>Management Development?</p>
C 3	<p>Yes we literally designed a bespoke management development and I can't remember the others off the top of my head.</p>
Jan	<p>Did you do one around resourcing?</p>
C 3	<p>I might have done. Sorry</p>
Jan	<p>No it's ok. It's been a while.</p>
C 3	<p>Well I finally got my certificate – I think Employee Relations, Health and Safety, Resourcing and there was one about managing training because I look after the corporate training too.</p>
Jan	<p>So it might have been L&D or MT&DF. So just talk to me about the process that you went through with A when you were having meetings and gathering evidence.</p>
C 3	<p>Well A came to meet up first in Hertford at our offices and we signed up for it. I don't know if you've ever met her but she is lovely and is very confident. Anything you think is a problem – no it's not. We're not going to wiggle out of this one. And so the option was that she could come to us or we could go to London and meet her so we would take it in turns and because I live in North London it was only one sort of train journey and just pop in to see her, which again took you away from the office and made you feel a bit more, I don't know, a bit more like you were going to do something really and so that was good. So we used to go I would either see her there or in St Albans if she was there.</p>

Jan	Right...
C 3	But I can't fault her she was very encouraging and she listened to what we'd done and it was also quite good as well because when you are doing it with someone else as well it was a bit like, you know, it was quite nice to have someone supporting me in my team. It also made you think ok, you had to tell the correct story because somebody else may be telling the same story. But no I quite enjoyed that going and then obviously, oh this is going to sound so bad, I was supposed to see for my final assessment in July. I know what happened they brought my operation forward – the idea was that after I had had the operation I would go for the assessment in the August. But unfortunately there were a few complications which meant I didn't get back to do it all which is why I didn't get assessment following summer. It was just really weird – as soon as I started it lots of things started to happen. I stupidly thought that while I was off for three months I would have written my dissertation and it would all have been over
Jan	Yes
C 3	But the drugs I was on were so strong I couldn't even read a trashy book never mind remember what was on the pages 2 days later, It was that kind of situation
Jan	Sounds quite serious... So it was almost a year from when you finished putting the portfolio together to having your assessment?
C 3	Well yes – there was just two final bits which to be fair – A could have left me but she didn't. She was always like 'Come on, come on' and by then my colleague had left as well so it was ... I kept emailing her saying 'what have you done?' and we trying to collect the final bits of evidence together but you know ... and then it was weird, I went back to work and it was Christmas and then, sods law, I got put onto jury service and then my child was in hospital with an operation which should have been off school for a week and ended up being a month. So I just had to keep saying 'I can't finish it yet'
Jan	It is one of those catalogues – you know you think 'How many things can possibly go wrong and you probably had them all!
C 3	Yeah you know but she didn't give up on me – she kept sending us little emails and once I remember sending her an email saying that I must be really mucking her about. And she said no – doesn't bother me, we've got your money.
Jan	(laughter) Exactly – when you are so close to it, it seems such a shame not to make that final little bit, that final commitment and to get it finished. She obviously kept on at you and you did it.
C 3	But you know – I've always before, apart from like NVQ s which are sort of at the college where I was working before, it was a bit more like 'We've just got the funding, quick let's get this done. I mean this is the first time I've done anything distance wise and I have struggled with that. I would – I don't know if I would willingly do it again and that's got nothing to do with her or Reed or whatever, even yourself and R, it's just before I managed to do college and with 2 babes in arms at one point and my husband was finishing his Masters. That worked quite well, we both went to college and uni and I did things like using the computer Saturday and he used it Sunday and that wasn't a problem

	– it was doing it so distant doesn't suit me
Jan	And I think that is a good point you have got to recognise that it doesn't suit everybody. And I think too all the events you had that year that is likely to cloud your view point as well.
C 3	Yes it was just one of those things. Obviously you don't have a hysterectomy every year
Jan	Well – would be strange if you did!
C 3	It's those kind of things that happened and I suppose if you'd been on a college course you would just have had to defer it until the next year.
Jan	And you can only defer it for so long if it is a college course whereas with this you are able to pick it up again. So it must have been quite strange when you had your assessment and all of the evidence and the storyboards were quite old by that point?
C 3	Well I had to change some, had to adapt storyboards and there was stuff that had come up as well. So some of those changed because on one bit it was about a pilot appraisal process that I had put in and then we had a new Head of Service came in and she was 'Right ok I am from the private sector and I am not from public and I want do this, this and this' and a lot of the evidence I had I still could have used it but there was more up to date stuff, and more things to get involved with and also I got involved with more things. So the storyboards were either adapted or. But yes I think I should have been with Ray for about an hour and a half and it was over 4 hours.
Jan	Well sometimes that's R – not you!
C 3	Well I remember ringing S and I think she chatted him up more than me!
Jan	Ok Let's just go back a stage – we've talked around the process and the support the things that happened to you during the year. Actually writing the storyboards – how did you find that?
C 3	Umm to be honest a lot of them it was A asking me questions – and then with this situation she captured bits and pieces then with me typing them as she spoke. Then we'd change – cos I can touch type so I type quite quickly and then she'd be asking me questions and I'd be typing it in. So it was quite a nice process with the two of us working together then we'd sort of break for lunch then continue then on other ones it was me doing it from the beginning and she was you know there were points of questions for me to .. so once we'd got to into it I actually felt it quite empowering. I quite enjoyed doing that – it did bring together the range of stuff that I do and for me it was reinforcing that I can do it really. I mean with my other job I've got certificates and qualifications and I feel quite confident I am a counsellor I am a therapist whereas HR, because I fell into it from another role and when I came to this company although I'd done HR stuff I'd really come with a training hat on and then they went 'because you've done HR can you do this?' It was always the fact that – well I actually I wasn't really here for that but now I feel more like not blagging it – if you know what I mean?
Jan	Yes

C 3	It's only my own self confidence whereas I 'd get various feedback from my manager and things and I am quite a good actress and it's just come across that I am sometimes I am a bit unsure – not that I – I know it in my heart of hearts, it's just making myself, you know just reinforcing it really
Jan	so in terms of producing the storyboards – you sort of did it between you?
C 3	Yes – I would just go down and spend the day in London or St Albans – we'd literally – she'd say 'Right today we'll do Employee Relations' and I had the storyboards before so I had thought about some ideas and looked at some evidence beforehand So I would work my way through the boards and already had some ideas. Could you hold on one second?
Jan	Yes certainly
C 3	Ok my husband is going to use this as an excuse to go and watch Tottenham down the pub. So because I had some information before so then I came with some scenarios and she would say 'ok I think this one fits best' and with some of them 'That's excellent but what evidence have you got?' and that there were a few things going on a director level but there were a few things going on off the cuff- no not that,
Jan	Not recorded?
C 3	And so I had some excellent ideas but 'how are you going to get evidence of that?'. So that was one of the things that held me back was one of the storyboards ... no I found it was quite a good process that we sort of took in... I am not quite sure if she should have been helping me to that extent but it worked and it made sure we'd capture it. She'd ask questions all the way through and the storyboards would grow as we went through
Jan	Yes and it sounds from some of the subjects you have talked about that is the electives, you could cross reference between some of them?
C 3	Yeah yeah there was a few especially like the Health and Safety training because we only had a small budget for health and safety but obviously it was making sure you made the best use of that resource. So there was a few, oh what was it – PM&D?
Jan	Yes People Management and Development.
C 3	Yes there was a few on those that cross referenced to some of the employee relations stuff. So again it was good in that things ticked more than one box. So it was just again showing the breath of some of the work that we did didn't just touch one aspect it touched two or three. So that was quite good. Sometimes there were just a few of the emails and things that, just trying to get hold of those really. I think I ended up getting a couple of statements from people but not many.
Jan	Yes, so witness statements. Ok right. You have told me about the process of the meetings and the process by which you built up the storyboards and some of the difficulties you had around the process, the personal and work related difficulties. Is there anything else about the overall process that, thinking back, you want to comment on?
C 3	Yes. I think the main thing for me just was empowerment of it really. You know to actually

	<p>collate, everything that you are doing, to look at actually what you're doing and that realisation that we are sort of, well I am a professional and I do a professional job, and you know the feedback I could include and the stories, I just found for me at that time with everything that was going on that was just invaluable and that was what sort of kept me going on the process. I just think the support I got from Reed was good and that is the think that I will really take away.</p>
Jan	<p>Ok. I don't think there is anything else I want to ask you. I would if possible like to have a look at your storyboards as well</p>
C 3	<p>ok</p>
Jan	<p>You are saying you haven't got them or have you still got them</p>
C 3	<p>I have got them on a memory stick</p>
Jan	<p>Right would you be able to email those to me?</p>
C 3	<p>Yes sure</p>
Jan	<p>That would be fantastic- as that's part of the overall process that I want to look at – that I need the way you have described it. What you actually produced as your storyboards. I know you and A produced those between you but it still tells the stories of the work that you've done in relation to the standards. So that would be really useful.</p>
C 3	<p>Yes you know and I think as you say it was just good for me with her experience as well, and sometimes little things would come up and I would say 'I don't really think that will fit' and she would say 'tell me more about it' and it fits this, this and this – oh yes it does doesn't it. And so some things you didn't really think were... you know I may have sold myself short really but if hadn't have been for her trying to sort of pull us all together and encapsulate it really so I found that really good.</p>
Jan	<p>It is that role of interpreting what you do and seeing where it fits the standards.</p>
C 3	<p>It is almost like when you are in therapy, you know you think 'Oh that counsellor is really brilliant' and the counsellor says 'really all I've done is repeat back to you what you told me' and it seems she very much played that sort of mentoring role.</p>
Jan	<p>That is interesting to reflect on that, now whether that is a coaching or a mentoring role it is just about being able to pick on what you have said and reflect it back to you.</p>
C 3	<p>I think for me that is the biggest thing that I will take away from it.</p>
Jan	<p>So I think I have got everything I need to hear from you so I am going to stop recording now</p>

Appendix 2 Candidate 3 People Management and Development

Practitioners must be able to:

Operational Indicators	K.Is
1. Implement appropriate people management and development policies, which maximise the contribution of people to organisational objectives and wider societal needs.	
7. Contribute to the effective implementation of appropriate PM&D policies in different types of organisations.	
<p>Professional Discussion (PD) conducted 00 June 2008. 00.00 indicates position on recording. 00.00 minutes in total.</p> <p>Introduction</p> <p>I’m currently employed for ██████████ District Council which is a government organisation. There are 350 employees spread over three sites, which are ██████████. The culture previously was one of a blame but this is now changing and is geared towards celebrating successes and looking at new ways of working.</p> <p>There are a one recognised Union which is Unison. Unison are consulted on all policies and their remit is to negotiate on pay at a national level then localised to our organisation.</p> <p>HR consists of five members of staff. Head of Service, three HR officers, one trainee vacancy, one HR admin and one HR admin vacancy.</p> <p>As the one of the HR Officers my remit is to deal with operations side of HR. In addition I am currently responsible for the admin assistants, training and development, IIP and general HR for the Internal Services Directorate.</p> <p>Polices that I have implemented are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Job evaluation protocol (EV17)• Appeal process for job evaluation (EV16)• Stress Policy (EV32)• Professional Career and Vocational Study Policy (EV46)• Training and Development Policy Oct 08 (EV47) <p>Policy Implementation – Training and Development/Professional Career and Vocational Study Policy</p> <p>Last year the training policies had to be reviewed as a result of our IiP action plan. I was responsible for drafting the policy. The policy then goes to Corporate Management Team (CMT), who is made up of Chief Exec and</p>	KI1

<p>three directors and Head of HR. Their remit is to review the policy and provide any input. The policy then goes to Unison for consultation and comment. The policy then goes to Local Joint Panel (LJP) which is made up of HR and Unison. The Head of service represents HR and is supported by an HR officer. If it is a policy that I have written then I will also be part of the LJP. If any issues are identified then they will be resolved at the LJP. However, HR and Unison meet on a monthly basis to discuss policies and any staff concerns. This is a forum for any issues associated with policy to be resolved prior to the LJP.</p> <p>If both parties at the LJP meeting agree on the policy then it will be forwarded to the HR committee, who comprises of Council members. HR and Unison are in attendance. As part of my remit I will also attend on occasions.</p> <p>The policy will then go to full Council, who is made up of Council members for final sign off.</p> <p>Policies are communicated to employees via intranet, which is accessible by all employees. As part of communication exercise I will devise a PowerPoint presentation and conduct bitesize training sessions to the employees on the various sites. (EV47). In addition, I will also place the PowerPoint presentation on the intranet.</p> <p>Elements of the PowerPoint presentation will be used as part of the induction process. E.g. As part of induction the new employee will be provided with a HR quiz, which covers sickness process, H&S, annual leave, pay day, flexible working, pensions. If the new employee is not aware of an element then I will pull up the PowerPoint presentation as a learning tool.(EV48)</p> <p>Evaluation/Reflection</p> <p>The training went well and was well received. The training was quite rounded as it included the two policies and the new appraisal paperwork, so staff understood the bigger picture. Some staff recorded that they only wanted training on the appraisal paperwork; while others said it gave the appraisals a sense of place, because they understood how it all fitted together.</p>	<p>KI10&12</p> <p>KI15</p>
<p>2. Supply accurate and timely advice on the rights and obligations of employers and employees arising from the contract of employment and associated legislation, bearing in mind conflicts of interest and issues of confidentiality.</p>	
<p>I have just recently assisted with an issue for a new HOS. His contract said he would be entitled to a casual car user allowance and due to his grade be able to join the company car lease scheme. He queried this when he join as one of his roles includes emergency planning and he holds the 24 hr phone and can be called to a situation 24 hrs a day. I checked the previously HOS's contract and they were entitled to essential car user allowance but it</p>	<p>KI13</p>

<p>was thought by the Director that was bought over from her previous position. A variety of phone calls developed over the day. I supported the reasons raised by the new HOS. He was contractually receiving a additional element for holding the emergency phone and heading up the emergency plan team so I would assume it would be essential for his to have access to a vehicle at all time to manage an situation that arises. The Director agreed and the essential allowance will be paid to the HOS each month. His contract was to be amended and back dated to his start date. (EV49)</p>	
<p>3. Access, use and interpret data from a range of internal and published sources in preparing and presenting reports.</p>	
<p>5. Manipulate people management and development databases, and provide advice on how to interpret the information and results they produce.</p>	
<p>Internal Sources</p> <p>Intranet</p> <p>Absence/Stat reports</p> <p>Exit interviews</p> <p>External Sources</p> <p>People Management</p> <p>IDEA</p> <p>EREA Eastern Region Employers Assembly</p> <p>HR Expert</p> <p>Employment Law Newsletters</p> <p>Personnel Today</p> <p>ACAS</p> <p>IIP (EV2 & 3)</p> <p>CIPD</p> <p>Reports</p> <p>CMT and DMT</p> <p>Budget Health Checks (EV56)</p>	<p>KI2</p>
<p>4. Contribute effectively to the planning, design and implementation of projects.</p>	

<p>8. Work in partnership with other stakeholders to help overcome blockages and barriers to change.</p>	
<p>Restructure</p> <p>The change is a restructure of the business support services. This was a result from the arrival of the new CE. There was a reallocation of people resources across the whole organisation. Initially the heads of department were affected then this was cascaded down to employees. The Internal Service Manager was blocking the change because of fear and loss of status. His concern was that if he lost the purchasing division, as this forms a major part of his budget responsibilities then this may affect his grade. Also there were two female members of staff who were perhaps disruptive in the sense they were undermining his authority. I have tried to support the manager, the head of service and director to assist with the change process. My main role is to support the head of services and the director to push the change through. Therefore, I have worked with the Internal Service Manager and have used my counselling skills in addition to influencing skills to try and get the manger to understand the change. If this manager does not buy into the change, it will happen regardless so it is important to try and win him over so that he is part of the process and to ensure that he does not feel that the change is being imposed upon him. The purchasing function has now be moved to internal audit but there are still issues over 14 hours which both services claim they require for service delivery and the director has asked me to get them to list their requirements to resolve this issue. (EV53)</p> <p>Evaluation and reflection</p> <p>The management development programme is giving managers move confidence to manage. But a lot of problems still remain from historic decisions made to smooth issues over instead of dealing with them at the time. The new management team are stronger and are now making staff aware that this is 2009 and what was decided in '1983' can and has to be changed. This is a welcomed and supported move by HR.</p>	<p>KI11</p> <p>KI7</p>
<p>9. Make recommendations about the advantages and disadvantages of outsourcing some or all elements of people management and development.</p>	
<p>The organisation was using a high number of temps from different agencies. It was decided to review the current recruitment provider, whose remit was to recruit temps up to long listing. The purpose of the review was a cost saving exercise. It was decided to look at Manpower as a potential provider. This was because they could offer other services in addition to recruitment. Manpower drew up an initial document outlining the potential service that they could provide. The HOS voiced concerns as the initial remit has expanded, which may have a staffing impact i.e. a post may be lost but an agreement has been reached. I amongst the HR staff asked to review the Manpower document and provide feedback. I also need to make sure the</p>	<p>KI11</p>

Recruitment and Selection reflects the changes in process, so the training is relevant and up to date. (EV54)	
10. Provide and use benchmarks and other measures to assess the contribution of people management and development to organisational success.	
<p>Benchmarking Tools Used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IIP • Absenteeism • Staff Turnover • Competency appraisals • Staff survey • Pay benchmarking • Equal opportunity Monitoring <p>Absenteeism</p> <p>One of my admin team was to review the policy but she has now retired so our new HR officer is looking at the policy. The current absence policy has a 10 day trigger i.e. if an employee has 10 days sick in a rolling year then a meeting either formal/informal should be conducted with the manager. I have received a variety of feedback from management stating that the 10 day timeframe is too short and should be longer. This is because sitting down with an employee conducting the meeting can be time consuming but it is effective. From an organisational perspective sickness absence has an adverse effect on (1) team performance in addition to (2) the current high vacancy that the organisation has.</p> <p>I will be involved in looking and commenting on the drafts and providing training to the managers once the final policy has been agreed by HR Committee. (EV 6)</p> <p>Sickness Benchmarking</p> <p>We have to provide stats to government on a quarterly basis, this is normally completed by my admin team. We also provided monthly sickness stats to our management board and they are discussed at DMT's. The council's sickness is improving. The reports are produced by another HR Officer, I get sent the information on a monthly basis to discuss and monitoring the directorate I support.</p>	KI3
11. Implement and operate cost-effective processes for recruiting and retaining the right calibre of staff for their organisation.	
<p>Recruitment</p> <p>Every department has a recruitment budget. Recruitment is very much</p>	

<p>interview led. HR can be part of the interview panel and this may be a remit of my role. HR may assist with the questions received from candidates or may be involved in devising and delivering the interview questions. (EV7)</p> <p>Our ultimate aim i.e. best practice, is that anyone on an interview panel should have received 'recruitment and selection training'. This is a two day event whereby I commission the services of an external provider. (EV54)</p> <p>On the 1st January we contracted to work with Manpower for temps and from the 1st April perm staff. All our recruitment will now be internal or will go through Manpower.</p> <p>In the past psychometric testing has been used successfully. I have been trained how to conduct these tests. So going forward I will be undertaking this task when required or using the testing as a training tool.</p> <p>Retention/Performance Related Bonus - Work from here</p> <p>After three years of employment managers are asked to sign a performance statement and if authorised the employee will receive a 5% monthly bonus in their pay. A member of my staff will liaise with the manager as part of the process but any issues raised will be addressed by me.</p> <p>I have just been part of a grievance process with a director and a member of staff (EV55)</p> <p>Training and Development</p> <p>The ethos of the organisation is to ensure staff are regularly trained and developed.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Corporate training plan: from their appraisal training plans will be created2. Professional training: e.g. CIPD, planning degrees, AAT3. Conference Budget: this pays for one off course e.g. legislation update (EV46 & 37) <p>Reflection/Evaluation</p> <p>The temporary staff recruitment was not cost effective which is why we looked at the Manpower contract option (cross refer PM&D9). Recruitment of permanent staff through the Reed contract was disappointing and other avenues were explored including with inter-net recruitment. When we recruit well we seem to do very well and when we do it badly it causes long term problems for the organisation which is why more robust recruitment tools are being implemented.</p>	<p>KI11</p> <p>KI14</p>
<p>12. Contribute to the design, development and delivery of learning and training and to utilise measures to evaluate their effectiveness in supporting organisational goals.</p>	

<p>Overall approach to learning and development</p> <p>Cross refer PM&D 11. The organisational operates three funding opportunities for T & D.</p> <p>Training Budget</p> <p>I manage a training budget of £64,000. It covers the corporate training for all staff for soft skills, management training, H & S training, legal training (RIPA) and other requirements.</p> <p>The training plans are collated from the staff PDR's. My role is to collate and analyse this information and devise a report supported by costing for CMT. CMT review the report and give me feedback on my findings and suggestion. Sometimes these are upheld as is fits with the organisations aims and priorities. Other times they may ask me to focus on other areas.</p> <p>(EV1)</p> <p>Flexible Working policy</p> <p>I designed and delivered a flexible working policy training session for HOS and for general staff briefings. The training was devised to support the implementation of a new policy. The sessions for HOS was a half-day event and the staff sessions were 1 hour bitesize sessions. I was supported on some of these sessions by a member of UNISON as the policy was a joint working document. I received verbal and electronic feedback on the sessions from staff and adapted my slides accordingly to make the presentation clearer. (EV4)</p> <p>Management Development Programme</p> <p>The feedback from staff was that our managers were very professional but needed support with people skills. As part of the restructuring the CEX agreed that all the new member of the senior management team had to participate in the Management Development Programme it was even written into their contracts of employment.</p> <p>We designed a bespoke programme that I was involved in the designing with two external trainers. We have been evaluating the training through the first cohort which was lead to minor changes for the second cohort. I have recently attended a review meeting with members of the first cohort to reflect on the training, look at what training needs they feel still need to be addressed and to think about what training we should be looking at for their managers. As the new HOS have learnt to delegate and look at their ways of working. This has had a knock on effect to their line managers and they feel they need support and new skills to carry this work out effectively. I have met with two providers and am contacting the HOS to get a defined answer to what they want and expect from their managers. This will help me outline a training programme for the next level of the organisation which will be for 30 middle managers. (EV50)</p>	<p>KI8</p> <p>KI3&4</p>
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<p>Maternity</p> <p>I used to deal with all the maternity cases, but now we have a full team of HR Officers each officer deals with the cases in their area. I am down to update the policy. (EV6)</p>	
<p>13. Work in partnership with other stakeholders to develop procedures and processes that enhance the commitment of employees and resolve conflict at work.</p>	
<p>Line managers are responsible Employee Relations with the support of HR. There are two unions namely Unison and GMB. Unison have the larger membership, have an onsite branch secretary and we consult with them. GMB is however growing, is based in Luton but will send out a rep when required. [REDACTED] do not tend to consult with GMB unless when they are dealing with individual staff matters. (EV26)</p> <p>Disciplinary of Housing</p> <p>The Housing Options Officer (HOO) made the decision to apply for an additional post namely, Electoral Services Officer. This role entailed collecting voting forms for residence. The Head of Electoral and Legal Service who is in charge of the process of the electoral register approached me for some advise. This is because his team had found some discrepancies with the electoral forms i.e. forms were completed for residence whom were deceased, moved, new to the electoral role due to age. The Head of Electoral Services alleged that approx 80 forms were completed by the HOO rather than the homeowners.</p> <p>I advised the Head of Electoral Services to speak to the HOO in regards to his concerns and advise her that they will conduct a formal investigation.</p> <p>I was asked to support the Director over the Housing Options Team to hear the case. The first hearing was cancelled due to the sickness of the HOO. At this point I advised the Director to determine whether the HOO had a doctors certificate, timeframe of the cert, reason for absence and to arrange a second hearing. The second hearing was rearranged due to illness and was conducted on the third attempt. Prior to the meeting the HOO sent in a letter advising that she would not be attending. After consultation with the Director it was decided that I would speak to the HOO to establish (1) why she was not attending the meeting (2) did she require any support. She stated that she could not emotionally attend therefore, the hearing was held in her absence. The decision was made to dismiss her due to the amount of evidence and the breach of trust. I provided input to the dismissal letter. I met with the HOO informed her about the outcome of the disciplinary, provided her with the letter and escorted her off the premises. As the HOO was emotionally upset I did offer her to get someone to pick her up,</p> <p>I then had to advise the team manger of the dismissal and advised not to inform the team in the event that the HOO appealed. (EV15)</p>	<p>KI13</p>

14. Provide advice about how to motivate and reward people so as to maximise employee contributions to organisational performance.	
<p>The pay structure is broad band. Employee progress up the scale points in their grades annually. Employees with satisfactory performance with other three years of service are entitled to an additional 5% per annum.</p> <p>Employees JD's are linked into the service objectives. The idea is that during the appraisal process there will be a discussion whether the JD and whether this fits with the service requirements.</p> <p>Non Monetary Awards:</p> <p>Reduction of gym</p> <p>Theatre</p> <p>Social Club</p> <p>Unison – as they are negotiating on employees behalf</p> <p>Free Car Parking</p> <p>Child care vouchers</p> <p>Local Government Pension</p> <p>5 extra additional annual leave days after 5 years service</p> <p>Flexible working</p> <p>Employees enjoy the 5% additional pay after 5 years. In addition the flexible working policy is seen as a benefit for staff.</p> <p>During the induction process employee are made aware of monetary and non monetary benefits.</p> <p>The benefit package is transparent but we do not produce annual benefit statements.</p> <p>(EV21)</p>	<p>KI14</p>

Knowledge Indicators

Practitioners must understand and be able to explain:

1. The implications for the effective management and development of people that arise from the changing nature of work and employment.
2. The context within which people management and development takes place in terms of government actions, legal requirements and wider societal needs.

3. The relationship between employing organisations and the economic and institutional frameworks within which they operate.
4. The role of research and change management skills in organisations.
5. The role of information technology in supporting people management and development.
6. The nature and importance of ethics, professionalism, equal opportunities and managing diversity.
7. The meaning of strategic management and its implications for people management and development.
8. How different aspects of personnel and development are integrated with each other, with business strategy and with organisational structures and cultures.
9. The ways in which people management & development is implemented by line managers, functional specialists and consultants, and how these interact with each other.
10. The contribution that people management & development can make to organisational success.
11. How effective recruitment, selection and performance management can contribute to organisational effectiveness
12. How effective learning and training processes can contribute to enhanced employee skills and organisational performance
13. How effective employment relations can contribute to increased employee potential and commitment
14. How effective reward management practices can contribute to enhanced employee motivation and satisfaction at work

Appendix 3 Interview Analysis Candidates

Propositional - HR

In this area I looked for examples of where candidates said that they had learned something about HR

Candidate 2 acknowledged that she had learned quite a lot because, even though she thought she would go into the process knowing all about it, her advisor would ask her about theories. Although she said that these went 'over the top of her head' she now knew things that she did not know before. So although she did not feel engaged with theories she was able to use these effectively with clients and knew what clients were talking about.

Candidate 3 stated that this made her realise the amount of work she was doing and it did bring together the range of things that she did and that it was reinforcing that she could do it really.

Candidate 7 said that there was one area of HR – Employment Law – that they felt they only got involved in on the fringes and that it was probably their weakest area on that basis. This candidate did stick to what they knew but felt that this was something that was automatic for them. This was, they felt, a classic scenario where you do something so often that it becomes the way that you always do it and you cannot quite remember the underpinning reasons. This process was useful for refreshing their knowledge. This candidate also recognised that their own experience and ability was a lot broader than they thought.

Process (PAC)

This area of learning was about the assessment of competence process itself.

Candidate 1 made several comments about the process, the first was that they felt that one elective in particular was aligned to text book rather than practice and this made it difficult for them and this contrasted with another elective which they found much easier and more straightforward. They also stated that they would not have got through the process without their advisor whose intervention made the storyboards easy to understand. They found that the process was not as simple as they first thought it would be: the big problem was trying to find evidence that they had produced themselves and then fully understanding what was required. They also commented that although they had produced an electronic file, that they would have found a bound file easier to look through because of referring backwards and forwards.

Candidate 2 found that the PAC process was 'tedious in the extreme'. They felt that with this they had to be 'all flowery' and the fact that they had to write in the first person was something they had not done since they wrote a diary in their teenage years. They found that they often repeated themselves.

Candidate 3 acknowledged that the elective that they were most frightened of, but which they probably found the easiest, was Employee Relations and a lot of that was their own confidence with colleagues saying 'You're not CIPD'. This candidate did feel that they were selling themselves short. They said that the process was really supportive and that their advisor played a mentoring role. This candidate was doing the PAC with a work colleague and also found this useful to have someone in

their team supporting them. Their advisor listened to what they had done and she tried to pull them together and encapsulate it which they found really good. Overall they found it to be a good experience.

Candidate 4 felt that with writing the narratives (storyboards) that they were not getting any of the stimulus that they normally associated with the learning process but that they were learning something. It felt like they were just regurgitating things that they had done. The most important aspect of the process for them was the guiding hand of their advisor. Although this was a different route than they would normally take, and not the kind of learning process they are used to as it was a lot more detailed and structured and a lot less critical and conceptual than they would normally like, they did say that, looking back they could see that it was a little bit more useful than they were giving it credit for at the time. The 3 hour interview was quite taxing as it did test them on areas but they did feel quite satisfied at the end of it.

Candidate 5 found it quite interesting that many of the things that they had done in their career they didn't necessarily see as being directly relevant until they had those conversations with their advisor. When they talked about them, they could see how they did connect and that they wouldn't necessarily have come up with those things themselves but because they were being helped to think about things in a different way they could see the connection.

Candidate 6 found the process straightforward and not very difficult, although it did take a few emails at the start to understand what the commitment would be. The candidate found that when their advisor sent them the storyboard that she had written, that it did not appear to come from them and did not have their own voice. This meant that there was a lot more work than this candidate had anticipated. They acknowledged that it is very difficult in the course of a five hour meeting to accurately get everything down and that some of it may have been their own fault. They may have said something and then, on reflection, thought that the emphasis was wrong. One aspect that may have been difficult for them was the feeling that this candidate had that sometimes they found themselves slightly shoe-horning some of their life into the specific requirements of the standards. They commented that they found their advisor 'pretty competent' but also that Google Desk Top made finding their easier. About the assessment interview they said that it was not taxing interview ever.

Candidate 7 thought that this looked like a straightforward process with the storyboards helping to explain the underpinning knowledge and was similar to processes with which they were already familiar. They did feel that part of the learning for them initially was that they were probably putting too much into their storyboards and the realisation that they did not need to include so much and that what was needed was quality not quantity. They also commented that the portfolio structure and storyboards suited them along with some indication of typical evidence that they were expected to generate. Another aspect was that they could do a bit then put it down. They felt that People Management and Development seemed like a logical place to start as it helped to set the context for Leadership and Management and the electives. They talked of the coaching and mentoring style of their advisor where their discussions helped them to contextualise without being directive – pushing them in the right direction, and that it was more facilitative than being really directive. That their advisor was a Learning and Development person probably helped.

This candidate also said that they had taken some of their experiences from this process and got their colleagues to apply them. They had been looking at how they could get a handle on capability for the HR function and the storyboard format: where you are actually putting together an HR technical competency framework and also using the new HR professional map as the basis for that.

Process HR

Under this heading were considered aspects of HR that candidates talked about that were to do with learning about HR processes.

Candidate 2 said how they had struggled with Employee Reward because they thought it was based on how public sector worked and it talked about job evaluation and fairness of reward practice whereas they thought that in private industry if you can get people for less than what they are actually worth then you do.

Personal

This section looked at realisations about the candidates themselves which were firstly to do with the PAC process and how they managed it and secondly about themselves generally.

Candidate 1 stated that they would not have got through the PAC process without their advisor. They also said that when they were faced with awarding body deadlines to meet that suited them because they work better under pressure.

Candidate 2's comments about personal learning all related to themselves rather than the PAC process specifically. They said how they were disciplined to get all of their storyboards done. This candidate wanted the portfolio to look right because how it was written and how it was laid out was very important to them. They also commented that reflective practice was something that they have never bothered with but they were made to do even though they thought it could be a little forced. What it did do was made them look back at some of the projects and writing the storyboards made them think of when things had gone wrong which they could have done better or differently. It made them review and made them think perhaps that they were not the sort of person who should have been in that situation and perhaps they should have given it to someone else.

For this candidate there was one event concerning bullying that really upset them and they actually found themselves writing about it and weeping at the computer. It brought all of that situation back and what it did do was made them think that they would never ever allow themselves to get into that situation again. They acknowledged that it has made them think and be very protective if anyone might do that again.

Candidate 3 felt that they process gave them that bit more discipline although working at a distance did not suit them. By bringing together the range of work that they had done they felt it was empowering and reinforced to them that they could do it, that they are a professional and do a professional job.

Candidate 4's experience was somewhat missed and they didn't really feel they were learning a great deal from the process as learning for them has always meant learning about something new.

So although this structure was not their preference the fact that they did it was quite satisfying because it was a different route than they would normally take.

This candidate also commented about an application of their learning which although it was not expected at work they felt that they were providing better quality reports as a result. They have since realised that actually the way they write reports at work does leave something to be desired and that someone at their level ought to be writing slightly better reports. By looking more closely at what they had written and knowing that it was going to be assessed they did learn something. So that when they next came to do a work report – suddenly all those things came a lot easier.

Candidate 5 commented that they would not have been able to complete without having so much support. By having the conversations they could then see how their work was relevant. They also felt that the meetings motivated them to get back on track. Their advisor helped them to focus while they were undergoing some major life changes.

Candidate 6 – in relation to them having to rework their storyboards into their own voice commented that they couldn't put a document out that didn't appear to come from them and that it needed to reflect what they felt to be reality in the way that they would have explained it. This was because they have a way of expressing themselves and there are certain verbs and adjectives that they might use and when they read it back it just didn't seem like it had come from them. It wasn't like it was their story and they wanted it to look like it had come from them.

This candidate also recognised that they are not good at filing which was needed for accessing their evidence.

A personal reaction to the process and outcome was they felt a little bit of a fraud compared to the rest of their team who have had to go off to college in the evenings, sit exams and do assignments and that if that had been their only option then they probably would not have bothered.

Candidate 7 stated that they had underestimated how much there was in their personal experience. They also recognised that they like to see a structure and that in terms of their learning style they like the type of collaborative learning when people sit down and work out things together with the level and approach of support being perfect for them. Their advisor encouraged them to think

Appendix 4 Spreadsheet Storyboard Analysis

C	O1 1	O1 2	O1 3	O1 4	O1 5	O1 6	O1 7	O1 8	O1 9	O1 10	O1 11	O1 12	O1 13	O1 14
1		CI 1 Centralisation of Belhaven Finance Dept, redundancies		C2 Payroll & HR system replacement				CI 1 Centralisation of Belhaven Finance Dept, redundancies				CI 3 Change programme		
								C2 Payroll & HR system replacement						
2	CI 1 Priority Perf Mgt 'Ways we work'	CI 3a Grievance brought against AI-F			CI 4 CMG Trg Mgr TNA	CI 5 CMG First Aid Trg & CQC overtraining		CI 1		CI 1	CI 10 L&D Mgr recruitment	CI 6	CI 8 Support for staff member = grievance raised agnst	
	CI 2 CMG L&D structure	CI 3b Bullying against AI-F						CI 9 Acquisition by rival co		CI 6 CMG Staff survey results 62% trg best thing		CI 7 e learning prize		
3		CI 2 HoS Car allowance		CI 2 Restructure		CI 3 HoS & Dir dispute		CI 4 Change and Int Serv Mgr resistance	CI 5 Review or recruitment provider			CI 6 FW Policy	CI 8 Disc HOO	
												CI 7 Mgt Dev & evaln		
								1 counselling skills						
4	CI 1 New Perf Mgt Policy (roadshows)	CI 2 Converting temp cont to 12 months fixed term	CI 4 Skills survey across orgn	CI 6 Proj Mgr Capability workstream of workforce strategy	CI 7 L&D workstream to shared services	CI 8 Manage external coaches	CI 10 Div trg - specific issues in NW	CI 14 Change prog in IT dpt - 1-1s with all staff	CI 7 L&D workstream to shared services	CI 16 IIP accreditation	CI 15 Changes to grad recrt to attract more	CI 17 L&D evln report	CI 18 TU correspondence - concern with div/seln for Talent programme	CI 1 New Perf Mgt Policy (roadshows)

	1 'We know' people feel more confident as result of Div wksp	CI 3 F/b to Dir evaln data from div trg	CI 5 L'ship frameowk r to assess l'ship needs	2 Proj Mgt trg 'taught me' effective method	3 Identify highest spend on course	CI 9 Femal mgr complaine d not supportin g extg mgrs	CI 11 Advised suppliers of specific issues when trg TOS	CI 7 L&D workstream to shared services	CI 15 Changes to grad rect to attract more					CI 19 Reward team member for commitmen t and effort
							CI 12 Joined HR network for L'ship Dev Frmwrk	CI 6 Proj Mgr Capability workstream of workforce strategy	4 Recognised mgrs would see disadv of outsourcing					
							CI 13 Part of S/H engageme nt group for Natl Schl Govt							
5		CI 1 CERN policy amalgam ation						CI 4 NERC Change tools	CI 5 Absence Manageme nt Course (attitude)			CI 7 MBTI Career Developme nt		CI 3 Pay benchmarks
		CI 2 LL Partnershi p												
		CI 6 New policy and strategy post TUPE												
											1 internationa l policy			3 key skills in project planning

											2 broadened horizons & opened mind to other ways of thinking about things based on different cultures			
6	CI 1 Discussions with Alistair Darling	CI 3 Pension change	CI 3b Pension change effect of web consultation	CI 7 M&A process		CI 8 Pension conflict of interest		CI 9 M&A Ericsson Payroll mtg				CI 10 elearning award	CI 11 Disciplinary and compromise agreement	
	CI 2 Dublin acquisition	CI 5 Age compliance change												
	CI 3 Pension changes	CI 6 TUPE Union recognition												
	CI 4 Holiday policy change													
	1 Critically reflect on my style	2 strength in using compromise agreements	3 extent to which can have meaningful consultation with all staff simultaneously	4 considered using pm tools but not sure if would make any more efficient				5 it became clear to push project forward I would have to adopt a different approach						
								6 models of change						

7	CI 1 Hydrasun Trg Lrng Comp Policy & Strat (LCMS)	CI 2 Disciplina ry Wylfa/Mo n trg apprentic e	CI 3 Magne N Resource, Lrng &Skills Strat	CI 5 Magnox N Knowledge Mgt PBI			CI 6 Magne N L&D policy	CI 7 Magnox N Lrng &Skills Peer Grp formation	CI 8 Magnox N Shared Servs - Trg Servs			CI 4 Hydrasun TNA Mobile Service Techs		CI 9 Magnox N Pensions/Pa y change
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Appendix 5 Key Findings

Candidates	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
INPUTS							
Motives	cv	credibility	left it late	job less secure	best way to use work	straight forward	orgn needed it
	quick	wanted done asap	promised boss	prof'l status		meet criteria	spend budget
	not college	not pers development					
Electives							
	pensions						
	perf mgt			perf mgt		perf mgt	
	emp rew					emp rew	
			emp rels			emp rels	
		mtdf	mtdf	mtdf			mtdf
		molk			molk		molk
		d&d		d&d	d&d		d&d
		l&d			l&d		l&d
			h&s				
			md	md	md	md	
PROCESSES							
Advisor positive	interpreter	theories	mentor support	facilitator	mentor support	competent	mentor coach encouraged to think
	support		encourage		conversation relevance connection		facilitated
			confident		motivated		

Advisor negative		misinterpreted		not actual learning		not written in own voice	
Interview	Dreaded it but enjoyed it Relaxed	Not challenging	4 hours	3 hours quite taxing satisfied positive exp	2 hours challenging	not taxing	2.5 hours bit nervous but less painful than expected and simpler
	phone	face to face	face to face	face to face	phone	face to face	
OUTPUT							
KI Prop	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
Actual Prop	2	23	2	5	24	13	12
KI Process	49	51	51	51	47	56	46
Actual Proc	5	11	1	7	1	3	0
KI Personal	0	3	2	3	3	1	3
Actual Personal	0	17	2	1	1	5	3
Perception of process	not as simple as first thought	tedious and frustrating	empowering	regurgitating	great to be able to use work already done	fairly straightforward	realistic straightforward s/bs invaluable

Information Sheet for Participants in the Research

Name of Project: Assessment and Learning: the role of storytelling

Researcher: Jan Maskell

Supervisor: Dr Paul Ashwin

Date: 30 September 2009

Dear Candidate

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study which is part of my PhD studies in the Department of Educational Research at the University of Lancaster. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study will look at assessment and learning within the PAC route to CIPD chartered membership. I am a consultant with Watson Martin Partnership and have a role as Advisor, Assessor and Internal Verifier for CIPD PAC and the Competence Based Certificate in Personnel Practice.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited to participate because you have recently had your assessment as part of the PAC process. Also I have not been your Advisor, Assessor or Internal Verifier so the possibility of bias is reduced.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary you can withdraw at any stage.

What will taking part involve for me?

I want to collect data from two sources. One source will be an informal semi structured telephone conversation which will be recorded and subsequently transcribed. The calls will last between half and one hour and will be conducted at your convenience. The other source will be the written storyboards you produced for your PAC portfolio which I would like to have access to and analyse to look at their structure and content.

I will be the only person who has access to the data and it will remain confidential. I will protect your anonymity by not using names in the presentation of the data.

What will I have to do?

If you are willing to participate in this research please sign the Consent Form and arrange a convenient time for your interview with me. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me and I will answer these for you.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The outcomes of your participation in this research will be greater understanding of learning and assessment which could lead to possible improvements to assessment processes. This would be of benefit to designers of learning and assessment and to future candidates in relation to their learning.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

Jan Maskell

Consultant North West Region, Watson Martin Partnership

Tel 01772 493052

Mob 07715 712992

jan@freckleton24.freerve.co.uk

Consent Form

Title of Project: Assessment and Learning: the role of storytelling

Name of Researcher: Jan Maskell

- 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 30 September 2009 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
- 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.
- 3. I consent to the interview/session being audio-recorded.
- 4. I agree to take part in the above study.

Please initial box

Name of Participant:
Date:
Signature:

Information Sheet for Participants in the Research

Name of Project: Assessment and Learning: the role of storytelling

Researcher: Jan Maskell

Supervisor: Dr Paul Ashwin

Date: 15 November 2012

Dear Advisor

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study which is part of my PhD studies in the Department of Educational Research at the University of Lancaster. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study will look at assessment and learning within the PAC route to CIPD chartered membership. I am a consultant with Watson Martin Partnership and have a role as Advisor, Assessor and Internal Verifier for CIPD PAC.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited to participate because you are or have been an Advisor for the PAC process.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary you can withdraw at any stage.

What will taking part involve for me?

I want to collect data from Advisors about their experience of advising. This will involve a conversation with me which I will record and transcribe. I will be the only person who has access to this data and it will remain confidential. I will protect your anonymity by not using names in the presentation of the data.

What will I have to do?

If you are willing to participate in this research please sign the Consent Form and arrange a convenient time for your interview with me. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me and I will answer these for you.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The outcomes of your participation in this research will be greater understanding of learning and assessment which could lead to possible improvements to assessment processes. This would be of benefit to designers of learning and assessment and to future candidates in relation to their learning.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

Jan Maskell

Mob 07715 712992 jnmskll@gmail.com, j.maskell@lancaster.ac.uk

paul.ashwin@lancaster.ac.uk

Consent Form

Title of Project: The role of narrative in the assessment of competence

Name of Researcher: Jan Maskell

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 15 November 2012 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

3. I consent to the interview/conversation being audio-recorded.

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

Please initial box

Name of Participant:

Date:

Signature (electronic signature is acceptable):

Appendix 8 Advisor 2 - Interview transcription

J	As a PAC advisor, in relation to a specific candidate what you would describe as your role
2	Last year I had quite a few candidates coming through from the prison service and I had 3 who due to re-structuring took on a role as HR business partners and as part of that they had to qualify with cipd. One of the candidates at xxx prison, he had a young family and had the job of balancing his family life with work and trying to achieve his cipd qualification. And often it is the girls who have to do that but he is one of those new men who like to share the family responsibilities. So as an advisor I had to sit him down quite often and say 'you need to plan your time in terms of being able to balance time, write your storyboard and find your evidence – sometimes you can do that in the work environment and sometimes you can give yourself an hour at home but do try and plan your time – and that was his real difficulty, applying himself when he gave himself that time. And I think with a lot of our candidates, as advisors, we have to understand their personal issues and try and advise accordingly. And he lost his father and had other difficulties, but with some help and guidance we got him there but I think as an advisor as well giving constructive feedback is such an important part of what we do and getting to know a candidate as there are those that are pretty confident and those that need nurturing. And those that you can tickle under the chin, pat them on the back and there are others who you need to shout at and say 'get on with the work'. This chap needed nurturing and I think as long as he was given some good deadlines he would work towards them. But there are those who will sit down and blitz their work and send it to you and there are those who think they have done it but they may not have covered all of the criteria. And again he sometimes tried to do that saying 'I've done it' and I would say 'Well done, however...' and I would need to feedback what else he needed to do. And, yes, there's a lot of psychology in being an advisor
J	So how would you differentiate between the face to face discussions and the email feedback – so the feedback in different forms
2	Yeah ok, I think face to face feedback can be relatively easy to achieve because you will have prepared what you want to say to someone and written feedback you've both got a record of what was said – so if you haven't done what I've asked you to do, but nevertheless face to face you can ask questions in terms of what you mean and what's required and that can be covered by email but there can be misunderstandings – I can't think of an example right now but there have been times when something needs to be done and it wasn't included but there it was in black and white
J	Thinking about this candidate in the prison service – you talked about him having some issues at home and having to focus on planning and setting deadlines – was there anything else you would say was your role or responsibility, anything specific you can think of?
2	In terms of giving advice or in terms of my role?
J	In terms of your role
2	Ok, well, I think if I generalise – with a lot of the candidates that I have had, we have actually become friends as well. And I have had at least three who have come back when they've completed and said 'would you act as my mentor?' outside of anything to do with cipd – which has been quite flattering really.
J	So have you done that?
2	I have yes. Just on a voluntary basis. I've enjoyed working with them and you know that they genuinely want to improve themselves and it's good to have someone outside of the organisation they can talk to, and hopefully I can help a bit but I don't know – even if it's just listening to them sometimes.
J	So if you think about those ones that have come back and said would you mentor them, what sorts of things were they after do you think?
2	Well one particular candidate I was thinking of in xxxxx organisation, which is a charity, and

	she is part of the senior management team with no-one in the organisation who she would want talk to about career prospects or moving on, so for her I think she has developed as much as she can within the organisation but she wants to do a bit more, still in charity work but perhaps bigger charities than the one she is in now and it was how to go about that and what she might need to do to develop other skills maybe more commercial awareness. Often it is down to the financial knowledge – which they don't really bother with when they are in HR. If you are going to make a contribution to an organisation you have got to have that. She was just one; I think it's great to be able to at least help guide people after they have actually qualified.
J	So, what was it do you think it was about the relationship you developed with those people that made them come back to ask you?
2	I think it's indicative of a lot of us as advisors that we have experience of HR and they look to us imparting some of that knowledge when discussing particular topics and they expect you to have been there, done it and know about it – and I think we get that respect because you have to have credibility to be able to advise. We can only gain that from having the knowledge and experience to pass on. I think that is probably why 'you know more than I do, so I want you to help me'
J	Yes – you did describe this as a mentoring role. So this was going off the original question about your role as a PAC advisor but I think it is really interesting and quite relevant. So, you talked about one particular candidate and how she wanted to develop beyond the role that she was in, so what sorts of things did you do with her?
2	Well again we were looking at different... well looking at developing her knowledge and skills outside of HR so that she could present herself as a general manager perhaps rather than as an HR manager still having that HR knowledge as she would want to do that but perhaps being able to make more of a strategic contribution to any organisation which she joins so we did look at perhaps gaining membership of the Chartered Management Institute as well as the cipd and just to get a different perspective perhaps on some things rather than the narrow focus of HR. I think she looking to go to xxxx college as well to do some sort of finance module as well. I think she probably had that knowledge but needed to have the confidence in her ability...
J	... and formalise it I suppose. Great, that's really interesting. I asked you to think about a specific candidate and you talked about the candidate in the prison service. How do you think your experience of that candidate was similar to/or different from the role that you had with other PAC candidates?
2	Well, thinking about some of them, because we have different types of candidate programmes – we have the executive candidates who were perhaps at a higher level in terms of their HR experience and the standard candidate candidates and I had remote candidates who were overseas and that had its own challenges because all of them had English as a second language and having to Skype call as well which sometimes distorts the sound, and having a language difficulty as well was extremely challenging for both parties because they often didn't understand me and I often didn't understand them.
J	Yes – adding in these layers of potential misunderstanding – it's hard enough when you are sat in a room with someone isn't it!
2	Yes that was where the written feedback was really important – I would often have to clarify what we had actually been speaking about – just to ensure that the understanding was there, and what actions they were going to take following the discussion, and yes, they were all appropriate candidates to undertake the PAC programme – because I think going back to our original diagnostic interview that is really useful in terms of making sure that the candidate is right in taking this route – otherwise they can really struggle. And there have been one or two along the way who perhaps weren't appropriate to undertake this type of programme – either because they hadn't got the experience or because they couldn't apply

	the skills that they had
J	If you think about candidates who have got the appropriate experience – how did you deal with those?
2	Well I can think of one who had just about got the sort of qualifying two years in the role of HR but in that time he hadn't really been given responsibility for anything much, because his manager – he was an HR advisor – his manager wasn't delegating to him. So there was difficulty in finding the evidence. Academically he was very bright and he knew the processes – so his underpinning knowledge was good – in terms of providing evidence of what he did, we would sit down in his discussions and we would say 'ok, if you haven't got evidence of, say a particular recruitment process – ask if you can do that next month' and he would then go away and do it.
J	So he had the opportunity there
2	Yes – it helped him in terms of looking at the organisation's processes and being able to contribute to updating them and gave him the work and evidence to be able to support what he was doing. But up until that point he hadn't been doing it.
J	Yes and that kind of goes against the whole principle of PAC which is around acknowledging the experience of what you have done and evidencing that
2	Yes I don't know how he managed to slip through the net. Nevertheless he was very capable
J	And if he's being given the opportunity to do things along the way then that does compensate for it
2	Normally that diagnostic process sorts out the candidates
J	And that's the point of it isn't it – because you don't want people to set themselves up to not be able to generate the evidence
2	Absolutely – and I've found several who hadn't really got the experience and being able to point them in a different direction – to go a tutored programme or college. Its horses for courses isn't it
J	Very funny – yes – courses! Something else you mentioned about having executive and standard candidates – how would you distinguish between them in terms of your role?
2	Oh golly. Yes exec candidates are normally the busy HR directors who for one reason or another would not want to go along to college to gain the qualification. They have the experience level and are quite able to demonstrate it but don't have the time available to be able to put together narratives, write assessments – whatever, or collect evidence because they are too busy. But nevertheless they do have to and it is the advisor's role to sit with them and make sure that we find the evidence together and talk about examples of what they had actually done and to demonstrate their competence - it's guiding them and then getting them to put information down in their narratives straight away. Then they might go away and not do anything because they are really busy! Whereas with a standard you are doing just that you are pointing them in the right direction – then they go away and do the work in their own time using their own self discipline. They have probably got more time to devote to the work. Exec candidates can be very demanding
J	From what you were saying, standard candidates can be as well if they haven't got that discipline to do the work
2	Yes and often they will fall by the wayside because they just don't do the work. So when you send an email saying 'how's it going?' to try and motivate, there are some who just don't complete and that's really sad when they've either been sponsored by an organisation to gain the qualified or indeed even self sponsored – and they still don't complete. And that's really frustrating – as an advisor it really is
J	And you know how straightforward it can be
2	And often it is just finding the time. And so that's where the exec candidates obviously benefit from having the advisor there for larger chunks of time – a different process but the result is the same, there still has to be a written narrative and they still have to provide

	evidence of what they do
J	The exec candidates still have to go away and find examples of what they do, don't they
2	But often I've been in their workplace rather than them coming to me – and often I can say to them 'well, what came across your desk yesterday? What were you dealing with?' and we can use it. That's been quite useful really.
J	And I guess you can physically go and look at the evidence
2	Yes you can. And I suppose to be fair you can, in Norwich – where the majority of my candidates are – the Norwich office is right in the middle of the city and nobody wants to go there because you can't park the car so I say 'where are your offices? I'll come to you'. Makes it easier to understand what they are all about
J	Yes and you can almost make judgements about things in the moment then can't you
2	Yes to put them in context. I had candidates at the local xxxx county council and the most dreadful soul destroying building in the whole world – County Hall – but nevertheless they get on and do the work that they have to do and I'm very impressed with the people who work there
J	Yes – in spite of their surroundings! That's a really good point. Is there anything else you can think of, in relation to your role as an advisor with the three types – standard, executive and remote?
2	Well I think with all three you are there to support and its always when you finish a meeting and I always say please call me, email me if there is anything that you didn't understand I can help you. And that's for any candidate really. In terms of differences I suppose with the exec candidates, once you've had the meeting with them they don't really need that support, it's just perhaps prompting them to do the work they need to do. With standard candidates I think perhaps sometimes they need a bit more advice along the way and in terms of feedback because they don't always get it right first time.
J	When you say feedback what are you giving them feedback on?
2	The work that they submit against the standards that they are trying to prove their competence against
J	So is that in terms of their storyboards or their evidence?
2	Their storyboards – the evidence often speaks for itself, normally it is appropriate evidence, but the storyboards themselves. The standard of writing really annoys me at times – it is not good, in terms of written English at times and that is a sad fact of life that grammatically and punctuation – they can't do it.
J	What do you do when you get a storyboard that's like that?
2	'Well I correct it and send it back saying 'don't you agree that it should look like this?' I can't help myself
J	It's the editor in you – you can't help it
2	I mean it's not changing their words – it's still saying how they do what they do – which does take a bit longer I must admit so it's a rod for my own back but...
J	It's important to you isn't it
2	Yes it is – if you are one of my candidates then that is the standard that I expect. Sometimes they're just not meeting the criteria – so I have to say that you haven't covered this particular aspect and so let's have a bit more narrative and a bit more evidence. Even though you've talked through different examples at your meeting, sometimes they go away and forget.
J	Yes – well there is really quite a lot to take in for some of them
2	Yes the majority of them do make notes along the way – and most will come along and want to do the work. Sometimes you do have to prompt them and guide them and put forward suggestions and they say 'oh yes I did do that' and you forget what you have done. And then with our remote candidates I suppose because you never meet them – it is really quite sad, I do like to meet my candidates but nevertheless if they are in Nigeria or Bangladesh it is not

	likely to happen. But then having said that, my Nigerian candidate came to London recently to visit family and he had his assessment in London at the xxx offices while he was here on holiday
J	Ah so you could have met them
2	And I didn't know when he was coming – they didn't tell me the date of the assessment. He actually called me from London and said 'I'm here are you coming down?' and I didn't know he was there which was really sad
J	Yes it would have been nice wouldn't it? Especially if they were successful in their assessment – which of course they would be if you had supported them
2	He was very good – he was in banking HR manager for a bank and covered most of Nigeria. He was always on the move – I had calls from him from airports and offices from all over Nigeria
J	Well that shows a lot of commitment from them doesn't it
2	It does and I think he really wanted to gain the cipd qualification and learn a bit more about UK legislation and HR in general. Every time we discussed a different elective he would then need to do a bit of research into what we do in the UK. That's good – he would just go away and do that
J	Yes and it is a requirement isn't it, if they are working in another country
2	Yes and compare it with Nigerian legislation. Some of what he was putting forward was really interesting in terms of how they deal with housing allowance and all sorts of things that we would never do in this country. But equally he would know exactly what to compare and contrast in terms of the UK – legislation and employment law. I really enjoyed talking to him. He's now gone off to do his management report so I've lost him to another advisor
J	So you don't support people with the MRR?
2	I do yes – but often it will be a different advisor for that part. That has happened to a few of mine. They know what they have to do but they go to the workshop and then are sent to another advisor
J	So I was going to ask you when you've advised candidates with their MRR how that might differ from the portfolio process
2	Well it does differ because it's the academic part of the whole qualification – getting down to the nitty gritty of research and critical evaluation which they may not have actually have covered off in any other storyboard or from their own experience. So a lot of candidates struggle with their MRRs – perhaps they haven't been in an academic environment for a while – or never. Nevertheless because it is related to an HR issue it is something hopefully they are familiar with in terms of the topic but not the research methods. I think the majority once they have done it are really pleased with themselves that they have actually achieved it and hopefully their recommendations are taken up by their organisations and that would be very satisfying at the end of the day – that the work they have done is used in the organisation
J	That it has actually made a difference
2	I think it has with quite a few
J	Have you supported many with the wbmrr
2	Yes I have. I think the last one I supported was the HR director with xxxxxx . they had the whole of the board of directors – I think it took them three months to come up with a new catchphrase for their marketing – in years gone bye it was xxxx wasn't it. And now they've come up with a strap line xxxxxx. They had diversified into producing other meats then they reverted to xxx Stick to the knitting as they say. He had so many projects within xxxxxx going on that he could have picked any number of them. And being a graduate as well he had completed dissertations at university so it was pretty straightforward
J	But he was doing a work based... so how was your role supporting him in doing that?
2	Well I think initially we had quite a long meeting to discuss his methodology as he wasn't

	quite sure of his target audience – where he was going to get his data from. But he did go along to the workshop which I think all candidates have found really useful – putting them in the right direction and I think this chap would do a draft of a particular section of the report and say ‘am I on the right track?’ and of course you can do that on one or two sections but then they have to produce the whole report and ... well he just got on with it. After our first discussion he just went away and did it
J	So was he doing the storyboards as well as his project so he would send you a couple of sections of his storyboard?
2	Yes – again I think it was the methodology – he knew what he was going to do but he wasn’t making reference to academic theory –he didn’t realise he had to do it.
J	Yes they often do that – ‘I know what I’ve got to do, why do I need to refer to anyone else?’
2	‘I’m doing this because that is going to work for me’
J	‘And because I’m the HR director and I can’
2	Yes exactly – but there have been several. One of my County Council ladies did a work based project – oh and another one in the NHS – she really got going with it. Sometimes candidates really do surprise you. She was a fairly weak candidate in terms of providing evidence for what she did and when it came to the wbmrr she had fantastic evidence for all sorts of things she had put forward – papers she had done, all to do with L&D and she really surprised me – she was actually working really well within her organisation it was what she was doing for me that wasn’t really up to much
J	How interesting!
2	So yes she did a really good job on her wbmrr and again didn’t really need much input from me other than ‘how are you getting on?’ ‘have you set yourself some deadlines?’ ‘do you know what your plan is – and are you sticking to it?’ and I think that is quite good with any of those mrr candidates that they have their plan and their milestone dates and they do try and keep to those milestone dates. Otherwise they get frustrated and they get reminders from me
J	So that is similar to what you described with the rest of the PAC about having to keep people on track and meet deadlines
2	Yes and some work better to having deadlines than others – I have had several who took nearly three years to complete – sometimes I would say they were excuses rather than reasons, but they just haven’t got on with the work and then there are others – I have just got a candidate now who has had breast cancer and she was having treatment and could not do the work – but there are all sorts of reasons why they don’t – some just don’t apply themselves it doesn’t matter how much you make them. But they do get there and sometimes it does take them two years rather than three years
J	And others complete really quickly
2	If they are motivated – or they have the time and some make the time – and they are a pleasure to work with because you just know if you say ‘can I have that work by that date you’ll have that work’
J	So for some people setting deadlines works and for others they just ignore them
2	They do and sometimes there are reasons why and I’ve always said to candidates ‘this is candidate driven’. Obviously your work takes precedence but if you can’t get to complete a storyboard one month then just be aware if you want to complete in these timescales then you’ve got to balance it.
J	I always say ‘this isn’t my qualification. I’ve got mine. This is yours and I’m not going to do it for you’
2	You find that they sometimes encourage other people in their organisation to undertake the qualification as well
J	If it works for them – as you say it’s a model for other people then isn’t it
2	Just as an aside – I work for another organisation as a tutor on the Advanced programme,

	and Intermediate and Foundation, and candidates say to me 'how do these competence based candidates complete the qualification so much quicker?' and it is quite a difficult one to explain because you wouldn't want to denigrate candidates who have gone through the PAC process who work jolly hard and explaining that these people have experience within the HR arena that you don't but you are here to learn – as practitioners they can provide evidence that they are competent against the standards where you have got to learn how you can apply those things. Some of them get it and some of them don't, 'why can't we do it that way?'
J	'If you were able to do it you could do it that way as well'
2	I think so many want to gain a qualification as quickly as possible and that is not the right route if you are not experienced
J	How long does it take? Is it four years still?
2	Yes quite lengthy. Nevertheless they learn a lot
J	I should hope so in four years!. That's great – we've talked about so many interesting things this morning – that's been really useful from my point of view. Is there anything else you want to add then?
2	No I think with what has happened in the last year moving to the framework and the assessment – still competence based most of it – but now they have to do two exams which they didn't have to under PAC – I do feel for those candidates because there are some who again haven't been in the academic world for a long time and are really quite worried about taking exams, however that is the way it is now. They are going to have to bite the bullet and do it. I think we have several PAC candidates desperately trying to complete by the end of the year
J	Yes to get in before the deadline yes I'm not surprised. Ok well thank you very much

Appendix 9 - Interview Analysis (advisors)

Advisor interview analysis

Advisors role

Knowledgeable (propositional)

1

He was an L&D professional so that was helpful being close to my experience so I felt quite knowledgeable as an advisor to be able to guide him.

found that easier when it was on areas that I was stronger in and more knowledgeable about, easier to spot where there is evidence

2

we have experience of HR and they look to us imparting some of that knowledge when discussing particular topics and they expect you to have been there, done it and know about it

you know more than I do, so I want you to help me'

Knowledge (standards)

1

holding the knowledge about what cipd standards were and what they were asking for.

Feedback (support direction - mentor)

1

I was telling him what the OI was about, the sorts of things we were looking for

I think the role with the MRR is slightly different – because he was writing that himself I was giving more feedback and giving more guidance it was more input than... more giving information and guiding him than trying to elicit information from him for me to write up

I sort of helped him think early on about keeping an eye out for possible projects

when I say giving information I think I mean giving feedback - it was more feedback about how he might present it

writing wasn't one of his strengths so I did give him quite a bit of feedback on structure and clarity as well as content

taking a more exec approach with him, being more directive because he is candidate who gives the impression of being very needy

2

as an advisor I had to sit him down quite often and say 'you need to plan your time in terms of being able to balance time, write your storyboard and find your evidence – sometimes you can do that in the work environment and sometimes you can give yourself an hour at home but do try and plan your time' – and that was his real difficulty, applying himself when he gave himself that time

I think as long as he was given some good deadlines he would work towards them

I would need to feedback what else he needed to do

the written feedback was really important – I would often have to clarify what we had actually been speaking about – just to ensure that the understanding was there, and what actions they were going to take following the discussion

with all three you are there to support and its always when you finish a meeting and I always say please call me, email me if there is anything that you didn't understand I can help you. And that's for any candidate really.

With standard candidates I think perhaps sometimes they need a bit more advice along the way and in terms of feedback because they don't always get it right first time

Their storyboards – the evidence often speaks for itself, normally it is appropriate evidence, but the storyboards themselves. The standard of writing really annoys me at times – it is not good, in terms of written English at times and that is a sad fact of life that grammatically and punctuation – they can't do it. I mean it's not changing their words – it's still saying how they do what they do – which does take a bit longer I must admit so it's a rod for my own back but...

Sometimes you do have to prompt them and guide them and put forward suggestions and they say 'oh yes I did do that' and you forget what you have done

it is the advisor's role to sit with them and make sure that we find the evidence together and talk about examples of what they had actually done and to demonstrate their competence - it's guiding them and then getting them to put information down in their narratives straight away.

with a standard you are doing just that you are pointing them in the right direction

3

storyboard and evidence grid and she worked on 2 or 3 Indicators only, sent them back to me. I reviewed them and gave her some feedback

And quite a lot of the stuff I've done with her on this has been to guide her

Feedback (facilitation – coach)

1

my role would be much more about providing feedback – this was much more facilitative and was around finding the right questions to ask to help him to find what would be good workplace examples to talk about

I would use my knowledge of other examples that he had given to either ask more about the same instance, say 'tell me more about this' or 'in what way could x, y, z' so I tried to maintain my knowledge of what he had already told me in previous meetings

2

as an advisor as well giving constructive feedback is such an important part of what we do

Motivating candidates

1

I'm really trying to boost his confidence and get him finished. I have had to chase him, he was disillusioned, he made complaints and he is so close – really just pushing him

because it was sort of seen as a sort of 'rescue' I think I sort of got the reputation for rescuing –

it's what you do with those who become dormant. I could send supportive emails – 'send me wherever you are up to, feedback, anything I can help you with?

2

as advisors, we have to understand their personal issues and try and advise accordingly.

getting to know a candidate as there are those that are pretty confident and those that need nurturing.

most will come along and want to do the work.

So when you send an email saying 'how's it going?' to try and motivate, there are some who just don't complete and that's really sad when they've either been sponsored by an organisation to gain the qualified or indeed even self sponsored – and they still don't complete. And that's really frustrating – as an advisor it really is

3

they say they're going to do something and then nothing happens. So I keep writing to them reminding them and still nothing happens and then after a period of time they come back all apologetic and say they haven't done it – but that's the way they are and that's the way the whole relationship is. I would say with some candidates there has to be a lot of pushing

I do some of the writing for the exec candidates but they've still got to be motivated

I think what I do try to do is try to motivate them – all of them and that is something that I do kind of think about quite a bit – about how best to motivate them

Personal (learning as an advisor)

1

one of those – which was a learning experience for me – was on Health and Safety, you assessed her and she was failed on her Health and Safety but her role didn't really allow her to do anything about

that to go away and build on - where it had been identified that she'd got - she wasn't meeting the requirements,

A learning point for me – I felt bad for the candidate that I hadn't been able to be more – to identify that before it got to assessment stage – which I should have done

So for me that was a failing on my part that that should have happened

I'm sure other candidates will have said this but it is interesting to reflect and this encourages you to reflect in a way that you otherwise might not choose to do – to think 'How does that work? Why do I do that? What have I learned from different candidates?'

2

and I think we get that respect because you have to have credibility to be able to advise

Challenges

1

we have the executive candidates who were perhaps at a higher level in terms of their HR experience and the standard candidate candidates and I had remote candidates who were overseas and that had its own challenges because all of them had English as a second language and having to Skype call as well which sometimes distorts the sound, and having a language difficulty as well was extremely challenging for both parties because they often didn't understand me and I often didn't understand them.

Exec candidates can be very demanding

3

I had to write to her Managing Director formally requesting to be given access to evidence

Candidates' role – from advisor interviews

Motivation/drive

1

The commitment, the motivation was there – tied in with his end of year performance objectives to get as well. So I explained to him that there was this executive route and I was already seeing someone else in the same location as him so I shared that with him as an example of how we did things. He said that sounds like exactly what I need and got the financial approval for that

Whilst there was some commitment and the keenness to achieve the end goal there wasn't quite the commitment to put the time in that was needed – that was personal time.

he was exceptionally good at going away and completing his actions which were largely sourcing his evidence. He was good at doing that and always committed during the meetings that we had.

his commitment.

He was familiar with the storyboards and wanted to complete it as quickly as possible – by April when his end of year objectives

2

exec candidates are normally the busy HR directors who for one reason or another would not want to go along to college to gain the qualification. They have the experience level and are quite able to demonstrate it but don't have the time available to be able to put together narratives, write assessments – whatever, or collect evidence because they are too busy.

he really wanted to gain the cipd qualification and learn a bit more about UK legislation and HR in general. Every time we discussed a different elective he would then need to do a bit of research into what we do in the UK. That's good – he would just go away and do that

some work better to having deadlines than others

If they are motivated – or they have the time and some make the time – and they are a pleasure to work with because you just know if you say 'can I have that work by that date you'll have that

3

and I think it's got more kudos – these sorts of countries than Europe getting formal qualifications

I never got the impression from her that this was about getting cipd qualification – it was about using the process to get as much as she could out of it and then get the qualification

I had quite a few candidates who were directors – they usually just want to get the qualification – they are a bit embarrassed they've not had it before and want to get it.

women from West Africa is that they are very highly motivated, hard working, dedicated, with lots of energy

Learning

1

he was from a very non academic background. Very open to learning and very reflective – you know how important the opportunity was and how much he had learned from it. How much he thinks, how much he'd done reading round when he wouldn't normally do that. Looking at what good practice was and encouraging the project team to look at benchmarking and what other organisations were doing. He felt that him doing PAC and choosing that project helped the project as well as his own learning

2

Academically he was very bright and he knew the processes – so his underpinning knowledge was good – in terms of providing evidence of what he did, we would sit down in his discussions and we would say 'ok, if you haven't got evidence of, say a particular recruitment process – ask if you can do that next month' and he would then go away and do it.

it helped him in terms of looking at the organisation's processes and being able to contribute to updating them and gave him the work and evidence to be able to support what he was doing

he really wanted to gain the cipd qualification and learn a bit more about UK legislation and HR in general. Every time we discussed a different elective he would then need to do a bit of research into what we do in the UK. That's good – he would just go away and do that

3

I think there's just this thirst for knowledge

it was about using the process to get as much as she could out of it and then get the qualification.

really around the indicators – really understood what they were meaning to think about her own experience in the context of those indicators

Challenges for candidates

1

been one or two along the way who perhaps weren't appropriate to undertake this type of programme – either because they hadn't got the experience or because they couldn't apply the skills that they had

difficulty in finding the evidence.

3

I think the trap was to show knowledge rather than competence

To describe all that she knows about those indicators, what her organisation has done, but not to describe or talk about exactly what she has done and her role in it. And then to get the evidence in her name and I have other candidates who have really struggled to get evidence in their own name

And she was doing the US equivalent.

Candidate type

1

exec candidates are normally the busy HR directors

the exec candidates obviously benefit from having the advisor there for larger chunks of time – a different process but the result is the same, there still has to be a written narrative and they still have to provide evidence of what they do