<u>'Having a mentor made this journey easier'</u>

An exploration of a formal, virtual, time-bound and paid-for mentoring programme in a dispersed third-sector organisation

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Abstract

There is a rise in formal mentoring schemes across organisations in different sectors, yet little is known about the way different mentoring scheme features shape participants' experiences of these relationships. Taking a developmental approach to mentoring (rather than a deficit approach) is an aspiration for many schemes; however, the existing literature does not identify which features support the developmental mentoring approach. This single case study of a formal, virtual, time-bound and paid-for mentoring scheme in a dispersed, third-sector organisation examines how mentoring can be developmental under these particular circumstances.

A review of the literature was carried out within three sectors: workplace, education and healthcare mentoring. This qualitative study involves an interpretivist ontology and a constructivist epistemology, and acknowledges the difficulties and benefits of being an insider-researcher. Semi-structured interviews were held with twenty-four women to examine their experiences as mentees or mentors. The interviews made use of images to prompt reflections. Eighty-two documents were examined to provide a context for the scheme. Data were imported into NVivo as a management tool, and were analysed thematically.

Four themes were found: the context within which the scheme is held; the features of the scheme; the relationships built by NCT mentees and mentors; and the development that has taken place for both mentees and mentors. The analysis suggests that understanding how NCT's mentoring scheme can be considered to be developmental relies upon the synergy between the organisational context, the nature of the relationships created and the way features and processes within the scheme operate. The alignment of the scheme with organisational goals proved to be crucial, as did the presence of trust. Different sources contributed to the presence of trust. Further research could examine the processes of the creation of trust which were found to be significant in the developmental nature of the scheme.

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Glossary

Branch – one of NCT's network of volunteer groups.

Client – the parent who accesses NCT services/courses.

CPD – Continuous Professional Development.

EP – Excellent Practitioner: one who has passed a gate-keeping assessment, a rigorous test of her skills evaluating knowledge of her specialism, facilitation skills, and other elements.

Essentials – a new type of antenatal course introduced in 2013.

HoEP – Head of NCT's Education and Practice Department, CH at the beginning of the scheme; VC took over half-way through this study.

HR – Human Resources.

NQP – newly-qualified practitioner.

Practitioner *or* NCTP – a self-employed education practitioner facilitating courses or services for NCT (e.g. antenatal teacher, breastfeeding counsellor, postnatal practitioner).

Probationer – an Essentials' practitioner in her first year post-qualification.

PIS – Participant Information Sheet.

PSA – Parent Services Area (administrative).

REO – NCT's Research Engagement Officer.

Signature – the established type of antenatal course.

Documents are referred to by a capital D and the date they were written (i.e. Dyymmdd); a full list is in Appendix 5.

Stylistically, the case organisation is known as 'NCT' not 'the NCT'.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Mentoring is traditionally a one-to-one, face-to-face relationship (Sanyal, 2017), usually within a workplace or community, and often between an older, more experienced person and a younger, less experienced one (Kram, 1985/1988). Changes in working patterns and technology use have created variations on traditional mentoring relationships, with peer mentoring (Ragins and Kram, 2007) and group mentoring (Kalen *et al.*, 2012); conducted no longer solely face-to-face but also by telephone, email (Murphy, 2011) or other electronic means (Ensher and Murphy, 2007).

Mentoring can be valuable to mentees, mentors and organisations (Rollins, Rutherford and Nickell, 2014; Kennett and Lomas, 2015; Bierema, 2017). Benefits to mentees and mentors might include increases in skills, knowledge and/or performance (Grima-Farrell, 2015), or of personal and professional development (Roberts, 2000). Organisations might benefit from retaining staff, and from the development of skills, knowledge and performance for staff who are mentees and mentors (Gut *et al.,* 2014). For third-sector organisations, it could be useful to encourage retention (Whybrow and Lancaster, 2012; Ramalho, 2014) as this may preserve funds otherwise spent on recruitment and training.

The historical origins of mentoring are widely deliberated (Garvey, 2017), although academic interest is largely a late twentieth century development (Gray, Garvey and Lane, 2016). This interest echoes the increased presence of mentoring in many sectors of life, including workplace, education and health care sectors, youth programmes and voluntary schemes. This increased interest has led to a proliferation of studies on the subject of mentoring, or of mentoring linked with coaching, within all the above areas (Headlam-Wells, 2004; Cooper, Williams and Awidi, 2014; Lasater *et al.*, 2014; Shpigelman, Weiss and Reiter, 2009). This proliferation provides a huge literature around mentoring, which can be categorised in several different ways. One of these is the consideration of whether mentoring is an informal relationship between two people, or whether it is formally arranged within an organisation. Informal mentoring is often seen as the superior form (Swap *et al.*, 2001; Brechtel, 2003; Ensher and Murphy, 2005), so it can be recommended (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007) that for formal mentoring to be effective, it is established along similar lines to informal mentoring.

Many studies are large-scale and positivist which are often distanced from participants (Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2009). However, Irby *et al.* (2017) found qualitative studies prominent in the three journals they studied, suggesting perhaps a shift in focus in recent years. Gray *et al.* (2016) suggest more empirical studies are needed in relation to mentoring. Generally not enough is known about formal mentoring schemes and how participants experience formal mentoring as a developmental relationship. Similarly, not enough is known about how virtual mentoring is experienced or what effect paying mentors has on experiences for both mentees and mentors. There are limited insights into how constraints on the length of mentoring interactions and relationships affect mentoring experiences. There is very little existing literature on how dispersed organisations use mentoring to support development. The space left by these limitations offers an opportunity for research, and thus a rationale for the current study.

1.1 Personal rationale for the study

My interest in mentoring stems from being mentored, and mentoring others, within the case organisation. In studying for an MA in Higher Education Practice at the University of Huddersfield I gained a better understanding of mentoring through a Coaching and Mentoring module. The MA dissertation involved a pilot mentoring scheme within NCT. Despite care to ensure the scheme was based on theory and good practice, it was flawed; even so, it facilitated some valuable outcomes for both mentees and mentors. These included mentees enjoying having a "protected reflective space", or a "sounding board for my own reflection." Around half the mentors involved were somewhat "satisfied" with the work they had done with mentees, with a quarter "very satisfied." Some felt that it was too early to tell, as the demands of the MA programme meant evaluations occurred relatively soon after initiating the scheme.

My involvement with NCT has spanned over thirty years, beginning with attending an antenatal course before my eldest child was born. Since then I have facilitated antenatal courses, assessed students and practitioners, been academic and pastoral tutor to students working on various courses, and worked on national groups. Currently, I am tutor and coordinator for NCT's mentoring programme, which provides a professional interest. The tutoring role involves selecting and training mentors, while coordinating includes providing mentors for mentees. This latter involves matching mentees with mentors, monitoring dyads remotely unless

intervention is required, providing group and one-to-one supervision for mentors, and evaluating feedback. The overall role has involved initiating and developing the programme from the outset. Due to these experiences, I have an extensive knowledge of the organisation and of people and processes within. It is important this is clear, as in order to evaluate the results of research, the researcher's role needs to be understood (Jones, Torres and Arminio, 2014). My point of view as an insider (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Day, 2012) of NCT's mentoring scheme gives me unrivalled opportunities to examine the programme and the people in it. These opportunities mean I am privileged in being able to understand the context and the programme, enabling an original contribution to knowledge and practice. This understanding brings potential pitfalls in how I undertake the research, and how I view data from the research. I need therefore to be very reflexive about how the research is conducted, and how the data is analysed. My view has to adapt from being a member *of* the organisation to being a researcher *on* the organisation.

Being mentor tutor and coordinator has necessitated maintaining an interest in the literature, both academic and in relation to practice. This stimulated interest in why NCT mentoring worked, when literature might suggest otherwise due to certain features of the scheme. My professional and academic experience thus informs this study, and the original contribution to knowledge from the study will impact particularly on my professional role within NCT, with practical applications to improve mentoring, plus gaining valuable theoretical and practical knowledge for the mentoring profession, particularly in dispersed organisations.

The combination of my personal, professional and academic interests in mentoring, together with the general lack of research into formal, virtual, time-bound and paid-for mentoring, mean this exploration has both personal resonance and theoretical and practical application. This current study therefore can begin to examine some of the limitations in the extant literature.

1.2 Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to explore how a formal, virtual mentoring programme, with paid mentors working in a limited time-frame, can support self-employed birth and parenthood education practitioners in their professional development. The context is a dispersed third-sector organisation, known as NCT. The objectives are:

1. To critically review literature relating to mentoring, across certain relevant sectors, specifically in relation to formal, virtual, paid and time-bound mentoring;

2. Through a single case study approach, explore the experiences and practices of mentoring within a dispersed third-sector organisation;

3. Analyse the single case study data, derived from in-depth interviews and documentary evidence, in relation to the existing literature on the practice of formal mentoring schemes; and

4. To contribute to existing theoretical knowledge and understanding, and professional mentoring practice, specifically in relation to how formal, virtual, paid and time-bound mentoring can be developmental within a dispersed organisation.

1.3 An overview of methodology

A crucial component to this study is that I am an insider-researcher (Chavez, 2008), which has specific implications examined in Chapters Three and Six. Qualitative methods have been chosen because I am interested in the lived experience of those taking part in the mentoring scheme in the case organisation. The research uses a single case study approach (Merriam, 2009; Thomas, 2011) with a combination of individuals' experiences and documentary evidence in context being sought. The most effective way to explore participants' experiences is to use a semi-structured interview, which will enable me to listen to them recount their perceptions of mentoring (Cunliffe, 2011). These phenomenological interviews (Roulston, 2010; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) include the use of the 'visual as prompt' method (Woodhouse, 2012:21) to enhance participant reflections. The setting shapes the case (Jones *et al.*, 2014), so understanding the context is important here. To clarify the context of the scheme, documents relating to mentoring within the case organisation were sourced and assessed. As the context of the study is inextricably linked with participants (Yin, 2014) a case study was felt to be appropriate.

The case organisation is NCT, a large charity within the UK. NCT provides support, services and education for people around the time of transition to parenthood (NCT 2012a). NCT also undertakes research into this transitional period and campaigns for better provision of maternity and early parenthood services. These different aspects to NCT are controlled by different departments (D170719; Appendix 8), providing a fragmented culture (Martin, 2004). However, the 'nested cultures' (Zachary, 2005:18) of NCT all share certain values encompassing service and support to parents. Although 'NCT' is used throughout, this study focuses on the Education and Practice Department of NCT, which trains and coordinates self-employed practitioners (NCTPs) who facilitate courses and offer services for NCT. Courses include antenatal (Signature and Essentials), breastfeeding, postnatal, baby massage, and yoga for pregnancy. The services NCT offers include breastfeeding counsellors and doulas (who support women during birth). NCT has two main offices in London and Bristol, but most work carried out for NCT is dispersed throughout the UK. Further contextual detail is found in Appendix 1.

The transition to parenthood is considered to be pivotal in family life:

> Leading child health experts worldwide agree that care given during the First 1,000 Days has more influence on a child's future than any other time in their life. (NCT, 2012a).

For example, babies with parents responding easily to their needs are likely to be more securely attached, quicker to soothe and adapt to new situations, and more likely to become adults capable of making satisfactory relationships (Hrdy [*sic*], 2015). Effective interventions at this stage are also seen as laying foundations for society, with social, economic and emotional improvements (DoE/DoH, 2011). Accordingly programmes and services provided for the transition to parenthood should be of excellent quality, enabling the support and nurturing of parents creating new families. NCT views itself as being there to support parents, particularly through pregnancy and the first year of a child's life (NCT, 2012a). However, other perceptions exist of NCT generally, and of practitioners in particular. The 'N' can be misinterpreted as 'natural' rather than 'national', which feeds a stereotypical view of the organisation. There is a perception that NCT urges natural birth, breastfeeding and attachment parenting (Pearlman, 2017), despite NCT's key message of informed decision-making: families should make decisions right for them, at the time they need to make them. 'Celebrity'

experiences often gain headlines (Walker, 2013), feeding the stereotype of archetypal hippie NCT antenatal teachers. This is referred to in NCT as 'knitting lentil sandals' to acknowledge the absurdity of the stereotype. However, some practitioners may work to their own agenda, rather than following NCT training and frameworks.

NCT (established in 1956) has run courses, particularly antenatal, for many years. For much of this time training for practitioners to facilitate courses was run by in-house tutors. Adapted training was ratified by the University of Bedfordshire in 1998. NCT College (NCT, 2012b) was established in 2013 in conjunction with the University of Worcester and the Open College Network to support and validate NCT's already rigorous approach to perinatal education. Qualified practitioners are observed and assessed at least once every three years by internal tutors and assessors for quality assurance. Opportunities for professional development are offered through study days, group reflective support meetings, access to research, national conferences, and (for some NCTPs) working with supervisors or mentors. Further background information is provided in Appendix 1, with a timeline of the introduction of mentoring into NCT in Appendix 2.

1.5 Key definitions and scoping of the mentoring literature

Mentoring can be defined in many different ways, which can lead to a lack of conceptual clarity (Darwin, 2000; Jones and Corner, 2012), beginning discussions around mentoring in a state of potential confusion. Also, as mentoring is a series of social, intellectual and emotional interactions (Ambrosetti, Knight and Dekkers, 2014) resulting from the attributes and beliefs of both mentee and mentor, it follows that each mentoring relationship has the capacity to be different. To add to the complexity, context and purpose can also be influential on the meaning of a mentoring relationship (Searby, 2014). Geographical location can affect working definitions: in the US mentoring often includes elements of sponsorship by the mentor (Sanyal, 2017) and in Western Europe, including the UK, mentoring is often defined as being more developmental (Clutterbuck, 2014).

It may be that a definitive meaning is not worth seeking (Megginson, 2000; Haggard *et al.*, 2011), or is simply impossible (Garvey and Westlander, 2016), although it is worthwhile being clear how mentoring is defined within an organisational scheme (Ghosh, 2012), to ensure participants understand what

they are doing, and their responsibilities. The definition of mentoring adopted by the case organisation is:

> A confidential, 1:1 strategy to assist with the professional development of individuals; helping them to learn, to reflect and to become more effective in what they do; and working towards the identification and nurturing of potential. (Appendix 3)

This definition was adapted from various sources to ensure mentors and mentees understand the purpose of mentoring (Ghosh, 2012) and to emphasise development for individuals as an aim. The definition was the subject of much discussion within the organisation, with contributions from senior staff and the first cohort of trainee mentors, which seems to have resulted in a useful guide to working.

Defining exactly what professional development means is not straightforward; it is often referred to in terms of what contributes to it, or why it is important, but rarely defined. One definition is:

> …activities that develop an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher. (OECD 2009:49)

Within the case organisation, professional development for a practitioner includes being more capable of working with parents effectively, through increased knowledge, skills and expertise. This is an implicit understanding rather than a documented one, although there is some reference on NCT's intranet to helping 'practitioners to stay updated and to refresh their skills for their NCT services to parents' (Babble, 2016).

The literature around mentoring is vast. Mentoring within the case organisation is not exactly like when teaching in a school or university context, or in a conventional business workplace or healthcare situation. However, each of these areas offers enough insight to the case organisation to enable drawing on relevant literature. As a result, these sectors have been selected to offer containment to the extant body of literature. Other sectors such as community or youth mentoring have not been accessed as there are fewer commonalities with NCT mentoring. The three sectors were considered relevant because of similarities to NCT mentoring, and because differences did not override the parallels. All sectors can use formal schemes working in a limited time-frame. Although workplace mentoring may involve some expectation to work with mentors (Ghosh, 2014), both education and healthcare require newly-qualified staff to do so (Orland-Barak and Hasin, 2010; Wilson, 2014). Differences include

there being some assessment involved in both education and healthcare mentoring; most employees in all three sectors are within single workplaces; and there is rarely protected time for mentoring in any sector.

Literature has been organised into themes from the research question and literature within the boundaries described above. Features of the design of the scheme detailed in the current study that potentially influence outcomes are examined. These include that the scheme is formal; it is conducted virtually; there is limited time for mentoring; mentors are rewarded financially; and mentoring is intended to be developmental. Literature is scarce around mentoring in third-sector organisations, (i.e. independent of government, value-driven to achieve social goals, and are 'not-for-personal-profit.' National Audit Office, n.d.). There is also a paucity of literature on mentoring in dispersed organisations. Therefore this study's focus on a dispersed third-sector organisation is a valuable contribution to the extant literature.

1.6 The structure of the thesis

This introduction has explained the rationale, aim and objectives of this research, with a specific definition of mentoring. The context of the case organisation has been explained. Other key definitions have been given, along with insights into relevant literature and methodology employed.

Chapter Two examines the literature to outline the territory of mentoring and the features of schemes intended to be developmental, within the three sectors of workplace, educational and healthcare mentoring.

Chapter Three presents my philosophical stance and the influence this has on the research. It explains the methodology involved in this study, with consideration of how to ensure the research is credible, given that I am an insider-researcher.

Chapter Four reports the results of interviews with participants, and documentary analysis within the case organisation. This is organised into themes selected after data analysis. These include the context of the organisation, the features involved in mentoring, and the relationships between mentees and mentors, as well as presenting evidence around the development of both mentees and mentors.

Chapter Five presents a discussion of the findings in Chapter Four in relation to literature. These are organised into themes: the developmental nature of the scheme, the context of the scheme, features and processes within the scheme and relationships formed by the scheme within the organisational context. What underlies the delivery of a mentoring scheme developmental in nature is identified.

Chapter Six identifies the conclusions and contributions made by the research, limitations of the study, areas of possible future study, and the implications of the research for mentoring, particularly within dispersed organisations.

Chapter Two: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter contains an appraisal of aspects of the vast literature around mentoring. Personal experiences of mentoring and being mentored guided initial reading through the literature, which led to the research question for this thesis; together these shaped the themes examined in this chapter. Due to the amount of literature available, boundaries were put in place on what was accessed for this thesis. Three sectors were included: workplace, education and healthcare sectors.

The following section considers the focus of mentoring, and how it can vary between contexts. Developmental mentoring is then examined, including elements within mentoring relationships, or programmes, potentially influencing whether mentoring is experienced as developmental. The significance of whether mentoring is formal or informal is then explored and related to whether formal mentoring can be developmental. This section includes insights into compulsory mentoring, matching of dyads, and time-bound mentoring as features of formal mentoring. Following that, virtual mentoring is explored, including different media used to facilitate mentoring when working at a distance rather than face-to-face with mentees. Literature around the idea of rewarding mentoring is examined as to whether it influences how mentoring is experienced. Finally, features appearing in high-quality mentoring relationships that enable developmental mentoring, and features of inferior mentoring, are appraised.

There can be issues with mentoring literature as Allen (2007:136) warns, associated with the lack of a universal definition, and studies not identifying whether formal or informal mentoring is the focus of the research (Gray *et al.*, 2016). Much research originates in America which often has a different model of mentoring to the UK (Clutterbuck, 2014) so may not be directly applicable. Most studies on mentoring use cross-sectional design and self-report surveys which limit the conclusions that can be drawn from their results (Gray *et al.*, 2016), and constrain suggestions of causality (Schunk and Mullen, 2013). Allen (2007) explains the limited success of quantitative research into relational dynamics within mentoring relationships, which leaves a place for qualitative studies to possibly discover more. Many early mentoring studies were based on men, which may not be directly applicable to a study entirely of women (Darwin, 2000). Only

limited literature on mentoring (and coaching) in the third-sector was found: examples being Whybrow and Lancaster (2012), and Ramalho (2014).

2.2 The focus of mentoring

Mentoring tends to have three main focuses as part of it being a supportive relationship; which of the three is most important depends on the context of the mentoring and the individuals involved. The primary focus is often career development, particularly in America where sponsorship mentoring can be important (Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2009). Career development could involve using challenging assignments to enable growth, skills coaching, exposure to important people or events, and protection (de Vries, Webb and Eveline, 2006; Hezlett and Gibson, 2007). Secondly, there is often a focus on psychosocial support, within a professional setting (Ragins and Kram, 2007; Ghosh, 2012). This aspect aims to enhance a mentee's sense of identity and self-worth (Hezlett and Gibson, 2007), and their competency and effectiveness (Kram, 1985/1988). It also includes acceptance, confirmation, counselling and friendship (de Vries *et al.*, 2006) by mentors. Finally, role-modelling by mentors can be important (Mitchell, Eby and Ragins, 2015), although this could be perceived as part of the psychosocial aspects (Kram, 1985/1988). Role modelling depends on the mentee perceiving similarities between herself and the mentor (Kram, 1985/1988) which could take the form of emulating the mentor (Chao, 2007), and includes appropriate attitudes, values and behaviours (de Vries *et al.*, 2006). Overall, mentoring is often intended to be developmental of mentees, or mentees and mentors.

2.3 Developmental mentoring

The term 'developmental' is used in different ways by authors. When used in connection with mentoring, interpretations vary from the very specific, such as task progress (Bokeno, 2009), to the more general engaging 'in a developmental activity' (Chun *et al.*, 2010:432), or even being developmental helping to define mentoring (Lai, 2005; Chandler, Kram and Yip, 2011; Brockbank and McGill, 2012; Schunk and Mullen, 2013). Perhaps whether a mentoring relationship is developmental can only be determined retrospectively: whether it has been one motivating individuals to learn and grow, exposing them to learning opportunities, and providing needed support (McCauley *et al.*, 1994; Douglas and McCauley, 1999). There is discussion around whether development should be career,

professional or personal, although these can be difficult to separate (Roberts, 2000; Ehrich, Hansford and Tennent, 2004) so perhaps they should be considered together. Clutterbuck (2007) sees the focus as personal development and learning, with career outcomes arising from these, rather than being a primary aim. He views the assumptions behind developmental mentoring as there being a significant difference in experience between mentee and mentor, the ability and need to leave aside mentors' power and influence as unimportant within relationships, a strong emphasis on personal growth and insight, and mutual learning.

Developmental mentoring has been summarised (Lejonberg, Elstad and Christophersen, 2015) as enabling stretching, challenging and risk-taking in a safe and supporting environment. Others (English and Sutton, 2000; Harrison, Dymoke and Pell, 2006; Daloz, 2012) agree that the combination of safety and challenge is crucial to development. Hay (2000) concurs: challenge and support are important, although her definition of developmental mentoring includes benefitting both parties, and that mentors should be more sounding board than role model. Development can also be enhanced by open, trusting, and emotionally competent mentoring relationships within dyads (Ehrich *et al.*, 2004; Gibson, 2005; Kram and Cherniss, 2007; Eby, 2012; Grima-Farrell, 2015; Richardson, 2015).

How the formal scheme is viewed by participants, and what purposes the mentee has, are also aspects that potentially influence whether mentoring relationships can be developmental. Whether a scheme was perceived as existing to correct deficiencies, and what the purpose of a scheme was viewed as being, could potentially affect any developmental focus.

2.3a The deficiency model and the influence of purpose

A mentoring relationship can highlight opportunities for development, with trust and confidence in mentees' capacity to develop (Brockbank and McGill, 2012), or it can focus on their deficiencies (Boyatzis, 2007). A deficiency focus is likely to miss opportunities for development (Garvey *et al.*, 2009), and therefore should be avoided (Hetherington, 2002). It could give mentoring a negative image (Metcalfe, 2014), as in studies where some staff members perceive mentoring as being only for those poor at their job (Hetherington, 2002; Salter, 2015). If widely held, this view could limit the value of a scheme, and deter people from

accessing mentoring. To avoid mentoring being viewed primarily as a deficit model, it can be considered important to concentrate on the positive, as de Vries *et al.* did in their study (2006). They felt their innovative developmental mentoring approach endeavoured to move women away from a position of being inherently deficient through not being male.

One interpretation of a deficit approach is as a 'quick-fix' for those lacking in knowledge or skills (Martinez, 2004:103), although this can be necessary in some circumstances, for example with medical students (McLaughlin *et al.*, 2013). Alred and Garvey (2000) highlight that a knowledge-productive environment can lead to mistakes stimulating learning, rather than showing deficiency, so it is clear that context can be important. Thus, an organisation with a culture of supporting people with their mistakes could approach individuals from a developmental stance, while acknowledging their deficiency in an area. This might be as opposed to a culture of punishing people, or denying rewards, for deficiencies. The purpose of a mentoring scheme can be crucial too. Mentoring can form rewards for performance, help someone's progress, or ensure all possible actions have been taken when someone is deficient (Alderfer, 2014). The intended use of a mentoring relationship can also affect whether it is developmental (Gibson, 2005). Those who wish to work towards personal growth and learning may gain the most from mentoring (Gibson, 2005). However, individual perceptions may not match organisational purposes for mentoring, and exploring both mentees' and mentors' perceptions of mentoring experiences may challenge, or support, negative and simplistic views of mentoring. Whether schemes are intended to be supportive, or offer safe spaces for reflection, or are aimed at challenging participants, can be important. The balance between these can be a powerful developmental influence (English and Sutton, 2000; Harrison *et al.*, 2006). Much organisational mentoring is aimed at increasing the skills and abilities of mentees (Gut *et al.,* 2014), or to develop both mentees and mentors, or to support organisational learning and development (Bear and Hwang, 2015). What is important is the clear definition within an organisation (Ghosh, 2012) to enable the understanding of the purpose of mentoring. Even with a clear purpose, there are very specific issues with mentoring within a dispersed organisation such as NCT.

<u>2.4 Mentoring in dispersed organisations</u>

A dispersed organisation, one that exists in several different locations rather than in one place (Warner and Witzel, 2004), presents challenges in relation to mentoring. The workforce has no workplace in common, and face-to-face interactions are less frequent, which may create a different type of culture (Liebowitz, 2007). This brings issues including logistics (HR.COM, 2002), communications (Picot, Reichwald and Wigand, 2008), and inevitably quality control. Workforce development can be difficult to organise, run and evaluate without a common workplace (Fruhlinger, 2001; Ofsted, 2012). One opportunity for enabling professional development is by using mentors to work with individuals (Merrick, 2017). This is not straightforward in a dispersed organisation: it is difficult (although not unknown) for informal mentoring to arise spontaneously, so a formal programme is needed to enable equity of opportunity. Without a common workplace, mentoring by necessity has to use virtual means of communication (i.e. telephone, email, and videoconferencing e.g. Skype) (Clutterbuck, 2010). So with a dispersed organisation, it may not be a question of deciding on how best to organise mentoring; rather it may be how to ensure the methods used are the best possible ones.

Mentoring research rarely features dispersed organisations, despite many studies of virtual mentoring schemes (Sanyal and Rigby, 2013; Cooper *et al.,* 2014; Lasater *et al.*, 2014), although there are some exceptions. Richardson (2015) and Emelo (2012) are two that were discovered, not in academic journals, but rather in other publications. Emelo (2012) focuses on how to enable virtual relationships by enhancing trust and empathy while Richardson (2015) presents a brief overview of the disadvantages of virtual mentoring, including some organisational practicalities to overcome these. However, there are parallels with other organisational studies. Hezlett and Gibson (2007) examined social capital theory and mentoring theory and found key concepts in common. These included outcomes, bad relationships, trust and information – aspects equally of interest within a dispersed organisation. The sharing of information may be particularly relevant within such an organisation, as the lack of a common workplace hinders sharing. This absence makes social relationships harder too, which may restrict favourable outcomes to mentoring (Hezlett and Gibson, 2007). Much informal mentoring within organisational settings may not be seen by companies or researchers (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007), particularly in dispersed

organisations. However, many schemes are formal in nature, and therefore visible (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007), and these are the focus of this study.

2.5 Formal and informal mentoring

The definition of formal mentoring involves the support of mentoring relationships by an organisation (Finkelstein and Poteet, 2010). In recent years formal mentoring has 'become increasingly recognised as an organisational best practice', with some reports of significant benefits for mentees, mentors and organisations from formal schemes (Allen, Finkelstein and Poteet, 2009:xi). These include increased organisational learning and knowledge creation (de Vries *et al.*, 2006; Fleig-Palmer and Schoorman, 2011). Despite this, there are suggestions that formal mentoring is inferior to informal mentoring (Swap *et al.*, 2001; Brechtel, 2003; Ensher and Murphy, 2005). However, formal programmes, which often try to reproduce the benefits of informal mentoring (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007), can attempt to address particular goals of an organisation, such as increasing diversity (Blake-Beard, O'Neill and McGowan, 2007) or developing leaders (Riley, 2009). Table 2.1 sums up the differences between informal and formal mentoring.

When considering formal mentoring, it is notable that research into differences from informal mentoring has been somewhat limited and contradictory. In Baugh and Fagenson-Eland's summary of studies (2007) there was disagreement over the amount of mentoring received, and the level of mentoring functions provided. However, no studies suggested that formal mentees received more support. There may be different expectations for formal and informal mentoring (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007); they may be higher if someone feels selected for special treatment when allocated a formal mentor, although this would not apply if mentoring was seen from a deficit viewpoint. Conversely, expectations may be lower due to not being naturally occurring mentoring relationships (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007). Time could also explain differences, as most formal mentoring relationships are time-bound by the organisation (Eby, 2012; Ragins, 2012), whereas informal relationships are not, and it may take time to get to know the mentee sufficiently to be useful to her. Allen (2007) notes that no studies considered dyads in both formal and informal schemes concurrently. I have only found one study in Mitchell *et al.* (2015), who did not deliberately set out to study both, and the formality of relationships was of little significance to outcomes.

Table 2.1 Differences between formal and informal mentoring.

Formal mentoring	Informal mentoring
Official scheme coordinator.	No organisational support for mentees or mentors.
Organisation selects both mentors and mentees, often based on organisational need.	Mentors and mentees are usually self-selected, based on similarity and attraction.
Relationships are assigned by the organisation, potentially strangers to one another with little or no choice, or possibly known by reputation or formal scheme constructs such as profiles.	Relationships develop naturally, with dyads' personal relationships, observation and interaction beforehand.
May be training for both mentors and mentees.	Unlikely to be formal training.
Level of commitment varies – may be uncertainty or resistance.	Level of commitment often very high as dyad works together voluntarily.
Time-scale usually determined by the organisation.	Time-scale worked out between mentee and mentor.
May have formal guidelines about how often to meet, what to discuss, goals for the mentee.	Content of mentoring and frequency of meeting worked out within the dyad.
Pair need to orient relationship towards either career/instrumental or psychosocial functions, or explicitly towards both.	Implicit agreement on mentoring function, on development orientation, and relational function.
Evaluation by scheme coordinator.	Ad hoc evaluation within dyad if any at all.
Tension between organisation needing benefits from mentoring, and what is best for the mentee.	The mentee's (and mentor's) interests are primary, with positive or negative results for the organisation.

Based on Clutterbuck (1998), Wanberg, Welsh and Hezlett, (2003), Gibson (2005), Blake-Beard *et al.* (2007), and Clutterbuck, Megginson and Bajer (2016).

Several issues with formal mentoring have been identified within literature. Relationships between mentees and mentors may be formal and uncomfortable with low compatibility, leading to uneasy interactions with restricted rapport and fewer opportunities to exchange mentoring functions, perhaps with disinterested mentors and passive mentees (Blake-Beard, 2001; Eby and Lockwood, 2005; Headlem-Wells, Gosland and Craig, 2005; Jones, Harris and Miles, 2009; Ghosh, 2014). The potentially authoritarian nature of formal schemes, which may be perceived as existing simply to pass on organisational culture, may offer less psychosocial support than informal mentoring, with less impact on career outcomes (Darwin, 2000; Roberts, 2000; Sosik, Lee and Bouquillon, 2005; Underhill, 2006). There are strong suggestions that informal mentoring is superior to formal in terms of satisfaction and career outcomes for mentees (Ragins and Cotton, 1999; Ensher and Murphy, 2005; Allen, Eby and Lentz, 2006a; Eby, 2012). Even the phrase formal mentoring could be considered a contradiction, as it cannot be forced by merely pairing people up (Bierema and Merriam, 2002; Bozeman and Feeney, 2007). However, despite being thought inferior to informal mentoring, formal mentoring is considered better than no mentoring at all (Ragins and Cotton, 1999; Ensher, Heun and Blanchard, 2003).

The posited superiority of informal mentoring may be explained by the similar-attraction theory (Chun *et al.*, 2010; Eby, 2012), where mentoring partners are selected due to being alike in some way, rendering higher quality relationships easier to form. A prevalent view in literature (Alred and Garvey, 2000; Hall and Kahn, 2002; Brechtel, 2003; Headlam-Wells, 2004; Headlam-Wells, Gosland and Craig, 2005; Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007; Ragins and Verbos, 2007; Ragins, 2012) is that high-quality relationships between mentors and mentees, whether formal or informal, are strongly associated with positive outcomes. Another potential explanation (Allen, 2007) suggests informal mentees are selected on the basis of their ability and willingness to learn, which could be why informal mentoring succeeds rather than the degree of formality involved. Alternatively, those who value learning and personal development may be more likely to appreciate, or to seek out, mentoring (Bouquillon, Sosik and Lee, 2005).

Formal mentoring is generally considered to benefit both parties within a dyad, and also the organisation overall (de Vries *et al.*, 2006; Kadivar, 2010), although there is some disagreement between studies. For example, Ehrich *et al.* (2004) pointed out that organisational benefits depend on sufficient financial and administrative support being present. Organisational benefits include improving

staff commitment (Wanberg *et al.*, 2003), retention (Gut *et al.*, 2014), and performance (Ehrich *et al.*, 2004; Kennett and Lomas, 2015), although any effects would be limited by the number of participants in mentoring schemes (Wanberg *et al.*, 2003). However, when mentoring finds someone whose interests are best served by leaving a workplace, this might be a significant cost to that organisation (Gibson, 2005).

Formal mentoring schemes need resources in order to function well (Ensher and Murphy, 2005): at the very least a programme coordinator (Clutterbuck, 2014; Koczka, 2017; Sanyal, 2017) is vital. Mentors need enough resourced time to enable conversations with mentees, the lack of which is one of the most frequently cited issues (Stewart-Lord, Baillie and Woods, 2017). Participation may need to be paid for or otherwise rewarded (as discussed in section 2.7). Overall, it could be considered that there is a lack of evidence-based research to inform formal mentoring programmes (Eby and Lockwood, 2005:445 citing Allen *et al.*, 2004; Allen *et al.*, 2006a; Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007; Allen *et al.*, 2009; Hamlin and Sage, 2011), hence an exploration of a formal mentoring programme could be valuable to both the theory and practice of mentoring. There are aspects around formal mentoring that can influence participants' experiences: how matching is carried out, whether mentoring is compulsory, and the use of time within the scheme.

2.5a Features of formal mentoring: time-bounds, matching of dyads, compulsory mentoring

In formal schemes one of the key features may be that time for mentoring could be restricted, either in duration or in limited hours within relationships (Eby, 2012; Ragins, 2012), unlike most informal mentoring, where the time spent is a matter for mentors and mentees to decide. There may be strategic reasons to limit time for mentoring. For example, Riley's (2009) scheme has time-limits for two purposes, to frame mentoring with an end in sight from the beginning, creating a sense of progression, and to lower potential resistance to mentoring caused by fear of demands on time, as concern about workload can limit participation (Aspfors and Franssen, 2015). A lack of time has been identified as one of the most frequently cited problems with mentoring (Ehrich *et al.*, 2004; Hegstad and Wentling, 2005; Lach *et al.*, 2013; Stewart-Lord *et al.*, 2017). This lack of time is a cost for mentors (Lai, 2005), and does not help mentees (Emelo, 2012).

There is evidence to suggest limiting time can constrain the effectiveness of mentoring (Feldman, 1999; Headlam-Wells, 2004; Gut *et al.*, 2014), as this can curtail 'cultivation' time (Kram, 1985/1988:48). Gibb and Telfer (2008) consider that an hour's session is the absolute minimum, and Smith-Jentsch *et al.* (2008) suggest unrestricted time may benefit e-mentoring by improving interactivity. In contrast, Sanyal and Rigby (2017) note the length of a relationship is not a measure of its quality, with restricted mentoring time still potentially being effective; in both short and long mentoring dialogues the same conversational phrases and main activities occur (Hennissen, *et al.*, 2011). Studies have found fifteen to twenty minutes (Single *et al.*, 2005; Kasprisin *et al.*, 2008; Hennissen *et al.*, 2011), or half an hour (Kadivar, 2010) invested per week is enough to discuss concerns and could develop satisfying and useful relationships. Thus, investigating the effect of limited time-frames would be of value.

One aspect inevitable in formal programmes is the matching of mentee to mentor, although in the early stages there might not be enough mentors to enable matching (Eby 2012). There is some debate around exactly how matches should be made (Clutterbuck, 2007; Eby, 2012). Richardson (2015) considers mentors and mentees who are too alike will have restricted opportunities for development. Some studies (Hale, 2000; Wanberg *et al.*, 2003) suggest a mixture of differences and similarities can be useful, while perceived similarity is said to be important by de Janasz and Godshalk (2013). Blake-Beard *et al.*, (2007) note that a carefully considered scheme, using information gathered from both mentee and mentor, is very different to pairing up two strangers with little input from them. What seems important is that mentees perceive they have input into the process (Wanberg *et al.*, 2003; Allen *et al.*, 2006a). Authors recommending arranging 'chemistry' meetings (Stewart-Lord *et al.*, 2017:70), or asking for mentee suggestions as to which mentor is wanted (Allen *et al.*, 2006a), clearly do not consider dispersed organisations. Further investigations into matching in formal schemes would therefore be useful.

Some authorities (Newby and Heide, 1992; Garvey, 2009; Mijares, Baxley and Bond, 2013) see mentoring as a voluntary activity. Wanberg *et al.* (2003) posited this applied only to mentors not mentees, surmising mentees would be pleased to have something planned for their benefit. A compulsory scheme may reduce mentees' commitment to a mentoring relationship (Eby 2012), or result in uncertainty as to the purpose and value of mentoring (Blake-Beard *et al.*, 2007). However, Allen *et al.* (2006a) found in their quantitative study of 175 mentees

that voluntary participation was not linked to higher quality, or quantity, in mentoring. Conversely, Parise and Forret (2008) found, in another quantitative study, that voluntary mentors in formal schemes had significantly greater satisfaction than enforced mentors, which might suggest higher involvement with mentees. There is no clear consensus around what effect compulsory mentoring has.

2.5b Interventions to enhance formal mentoring

There is some empirical evidence that informal mentoring is more effective than formal, although this is based mainly on quantitative studies (Allen *et al.*, 2008). It is suggested (Ragins and Cotton, 1999; Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007) that formal schemes should mimic informal mentoring where possible to improve the chances of programmes being successful, although this is a theoretical approach (Allen, Eby and Lentz, 2006b) rather than an empirical finding. Allen *et al.* (2006b), for example, note that training, often recommended as essential for formal schemes, is rarely part of informal mentoring. There may be ways of ameliorating possible issues around formal mentoring; for example, with organisational support valuing mentors (Ghosh, 2014), and with cultural norms encouraging mentoring (Wanberg, Kammeyer-Mueller and Marchese, 2006). Formal programmes are often limited in duration, which Ragins (2012) suggests can prevent high quality relationships forming; nine months is proposed (Weinberg and Lankau, 2011) as the effective minimum for mentoring relationships. Some researchers (Fagenson-Eland, Marks and Amendola, 1997) have argued that longer relationships enable mentees to become more experienced at being mentored, potentially increasing career guidance and psychosocial support gained from their mentors. However, LoCasale-Crouch *et al.* (2012) warn that just increasing available time does not necessarily mean mentoring improves.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, informal mentoring is often between dyads with similarities drawing them together. Formal mentoring often tries to mimic this through careful matching of dyads (Ragins and Cotton, 1999). Some voluntary input into matching processes (Ghosh, 2014) may enhance formal mentoring, as this may increase similarity between mentor and mentee which in turn could improve the quality of mentoring relationships (Hale, 2000; Allen and Eby, 2003; Murphy, 2011; Eby *et al.*, 2013). The frequency of interactions (Wanberg *et al.*,

2003; Murphy, 2011) can also increase quality within the dyad, although Ensher and Murphy (2007) suggest this may be effect rather than cause, as more satisfied dyads communicate more frequently.

There is then, disagreement as to whether formal or informal mentoring is superior, although there are measures that can be taken to improve any scheme. It could also be considered that judging mentoring solely on the informal versus formal divide is too simplistic, as the level of satisfaction with the quality of the mentoring relationship is what matters (Ragins, Cotton and Miller, 2000; Allen and Eby, 2003; Wanberg *et al.*, 2003; Ragins, 2012). Satisfaction with the mentoring relationship, and the quality of such, may also be more important than which technology is involved (Headlam Wells *et al.*, 2005) in virtual mentoring.

2.6 Virtual mentoring

Historically, mentoring occurred mainly through face-to-face interactive relationships (Bierema and Merriam, 2002; Sanyal and Rigby, 2013). As technology has entered into many fields, its potential for use within mentoring has been explored, although there are still gaps (Clutterbuck, 2010; Bierema, 2017). Virtual mentoring has been studied in all three relevant contexts: education (Friedman *et al.*, 2004), workplace (Emelo, 2012) and healthcare (Lasater *et al.*, 2014). It has different forms, including telephone, email, and videoconferencing such as Skype, and is known by different names (Clutterbuck, 2010). Forms such as telephone and Skype are, like face-to-face mentoring, synchronous, while email and some web-based applications are asynchronous; all have advantages and disadvantages. These technologies mean more dispersed organisations can now benefit from mentoring (Matuszek, Self and Schraeder, 2008; Ekeland and Velure, 2017) as geographical and cultural barriers are minimised (Bierema, 2017).

Much of the literature refers to e-mentoring, often using Bierema and Merriam's (2002:214) definition:

> …a computer mediated, mutually beneficial relationship between a mentor and a protégé which provides learning, advising, encouraging, promoting, and modeling, that is often boundaryless, egalitarian, and qualitatively different than traditional face-to-face mentoring.

This definition summarises the advantages of mentoring by email; it serves to lessen the gap between mentor and mentee, often obscuring social or

hierarchical differences (Ensher and Murphy, 2007; Richardson, 2015), especially if time is unlimited (Smith-Jentsch *et al.*, 2008). Other advantages of email mentoring include the avoidance of visual distractions of appearance (Ensher and Murphy, 2007), and decreasing the importance of surface-level characteristics between mentor and mentee (Murphy, 2011), including minimising power dynamics (Clutterbuck, 2010). For mentors, a more personal and informal exchange is enabled which may lead to deeper involvement (Murphy, 2011). In addition, email is flexible as it can be accessed at any time, easing the weight of time on mentors (Fagenson-Eland and Lu, 2004), which may in turn lessen mentee perceptions of being a burden.

The asynchronous nature of email can be both an advantage and disadvantage as asynchronicity lessens pressure to respond immediately, building in thinking time (Clutterbuck, 2010), which enables more reflective responses, particularly for mentors (Headlam Wells *et al.*, 2005). However, it can emphasise delays in responding which may feel disjointed (Bierema, 2017) or like a silence (Cox, 2005a), possibly provoking losses of confidence for mentees or enthusiasm from mentors (Fagenson-Eland and Lu, 2004). Other disadvantages include a lack of visual and auditory cues including body language (Garvey *et al*., 2009), the possibility of technology malfunctioning (Ensher *et al.*, 2003), and issues with privacy and confidentiality (Fagenson-Eland and Lu, 2004). Richardson (2015) notes that it is more difficult to train people in the interpersonal skills needed for successful e-mentoring, including the use of language (Smith-Jentsch *et al.*, 2008). Difficulties here can cause trust issues and lack of effective on-line communication (Rowland, 2012). Ensher *et al.* (2003) consider online mentors as less effective role models for their mentees, despite Bierema and Merriam's definition above (2002).

There are fewer studies specifically on telephone mentoring. In Clutterbuck's view (2010; 2014), a very experienced mentor is needed when working purely by telephone as it is hard to listen effectively. There can be inherent difficulties in its use, including the ease with which people can be distracted or attempt to multi-task at the same time (Clutterbuck, 2010). This is not the experience of McLaughlin (2013:1), who found that it was a 'powerful, flexible and highly creative tool' albeit for coaching not mentoring. Using the telephone overcomes many issues with working in a dispersed organisation, as long as technical issues do not interfere. Although visual clues are missing, tonal, volume or speed variations, and even silences can be very informative (Hussain, 2010; Lechuga,

2012), and Clutterbuck (2010:19) acknowledges that the telephone can offer a sense of 'just-in-time' immediacy. In other fields, data produced in a qualitative study was found to be the same quality and quantity in telephone and face-to-face interviews (Sweet, 2002), and Lechuga (2012) found interviewing by telephone increases disclosure, due perhaps to a sense of anonymity. Counselling by telephone is acceptable, albeit offering a different experience (Sanders, 2007). These sources may be applicable to mentoring; both effective qualitative interviewing and counselling depend on establishing rapport, at least. Murphy (2011:618) found that 'blended mentoring', defined as email plus phone or face-to-face, increased positive outcomes for both partners in mentoring relationships. This is supported by Thompson, Jeffries and Topping (2010), where face-to-face meetings were seen as essential as contact solely by virtual methods seemed unsuccessful.

The use of videoconferencing in mentoring is under-researched. Clutterbuck (2010) argues using Skype will overcome some of the problems of telephone mentoring, and Hwang and Vrongistinos (2012) find a combination of Skype and other electronic mentoring beneficial to new teachers' experiences. Hussain (2010) considers videoconferencing similar to being in the same room, although connection issues can be a problem. Non-verbal cues are almost as evident (depending on signal quality) on-screen as they are in person (Sanyal, 2017), although body language may be hidden to some extent. This lack of interaction may lessen the quality and impact of information being exchanged (Bayles, 2012), albeit in the therapeutic field. Examining how virtual teams work together to create social capital, Striukova and Rayna (2008) consider trust difficult to create between teams separated by physical distance, although as long as shared values were present between members of the team, videoconferencing could ameliorate this. Evidently, there is a conflicting body of knowledge around whether email, telephone and videoconferencing are suitable for mentoring, and further study on this would be useful (Lasater *et al.*, 2014).

2.6a Managing the challenges of virtual mentoring

Given the distances involved within dispersed organisations, face-to-face mentoring cannot be mandatory within formal programmes. The influence of distance between mentee and mentor can be significant, with some studies (Wanberg *et al.*, 2003; Long *et al.*, 2012) suggesting distance mentoring is not as

effective as schemes where people meet in person. However, Allen *et al.* (2006a) found in their quantitative study that proximity was not related to the variables studied (e.g. mentoring behaviour, or satisfaction). They advocated qualitative research focusing on distance mentoring dyads as useful for understanding what contributes to the effectiveness of these relationships. As virtual mentoring is the only option for many dispersed organisations, and it is possible that advantages of virtual mentoring overall may outweigh disadvantages (Ensher *et al.*, 2003), what may be important is finding ways to compensate for any drawbacks. This study attempts to fill this gap by exploring participants' experiences of virtual mentoring.

Recommendations to alleviate the drawbacks of virtual mentoring include (Ensher *et al.*, 2003) training to avoid miscommunication, and managing expectations such as slower developing relationships. Training of mentees may be more effective than training mentors; Kasprisin *et al.*'s (2008) quantitative study found that training mentees encouraged contact with mentors, increasing satisfaction for both partners despite only a few extra emails over the control group. Principles of non-violent communication, attempting to avoid blame and criticism focusing instead on needs and requests (Rosenberg, 2009), have been shown to encourage trusting, open, e-mentoring relationships (Cox, 2005a). Richardson (2105) suggests that careful matching can support e-mentoring. Using emoticons to alleviate difficulties with email such as the inability to read people's emotions, or introducing webcams (Rowland, 2012) may also help. Zolin and Hinds (2007) suggest higher levels of information as useful in enabling distributed dyads (rather than mentoring partners) assess trustworthiness in one another. Previous studies therefore suggest that although virtual mentoring can be valuable, there are issues with what form this should take, and how it can be managed in a formal scheme. Ameliorating disadvantages is important, both for the mentee's benefit, and as difficulties might reduce intrinsic rewards mentoring brings for mentors.

2.7 Rewarding mentoring

Mentoring holds intrinsic benefits for mentors, including learning and development of skills and confidence (Riley, 2009; Rollins *et al.*, 2014). Rewarding and recognising mentors may contribute to learning cultures within organisations (Kram and Cherniss, 2007) and incentives may encourage

participants in formal mentoring (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007). One potential incentive is payment, although it is not often associated with mentoring (Gerstein, Wilkeson and Anderson, 2004; Kasprisin *et al.*, 2008; Gray *et al.*, 2016). However, it is not unprecedented although it is rarely studied (Hayes and Scott, 2007; Terrion and Leonard, 2010; Cooper *et al.*, 2014). Some studies refer (Wallace and Gravells, 2007; Young and Cates, 2010) to token payments. Other studies (Newby and Heide, 1992; Swap *et al.*, 2001; Hall and Khan, 2002; Ramani, Gruppen and Kachur, 2006; Trorey and Blamires, 2006; Hezlett and Gibson, 2007; Ghosh, 2014) refer to rewarding mentors without clarifying what rewards or incentives (Kadivar, 2010) might be used.

Mentoring can be seen as a burden for mentors (Darwin, 2000; Ehrich *et al.*, 2004) or as a drain on their time (Allen *et al.*, 2009). There is broad agreement (Lai, 2005; de Vries *et al.*, 2006; Ramani *et al.*, 2006; Wilson, 2014; Aspfors and Franssen, 2015) that mentors find everyday responsibilities leave little or no time for working with mentees. When schedules do not allocate time for mentoring (Lach *et al.*, 2013) mentees are often frustrated. All of which might explain why Eby and Lockwood (2005:44) found mentees were more likely to perceive formal mentors as 'disinterested' than informal mentors. Payment does help to protect a mentor's time (Ramani *et al.*, 2006; Cooper *et al.*, 2014), even if it is only by reducing the need to seek work elsewhere (Terrion and Leonard, 2010). In Gilles and Wilson's (2004) study, teachers are excused from normal classroom teaching, while mentoring forms part of their remunerated role. It has been suggested (Hegstad and Wentling, 2005) that linking formal mentoring to reward systems (such as pay increases and promotions) helps to make mentoring a professional, rather than a volunteer role. Thus the motivation of, and recognition or reward for, mentors in formal schemes can be important (Wanberg *et al.*, 2003; Ehrich *et al.*, 2004; Allen *et al.*, 2009; Ghosh, 2014).

One conceivable drawback (Thompson *et al.*, 2010) of payment is that mentors may end up chasing mentees who are already well supported, due to ethical and contractual concerns about being paid for a certain number of hours of mentoring. Although payment for mentoring is not usual it 'raises many interesting questions' and therefore requires further research (Terrion and Leonard, 2010:89). Mentor payment is a way for an organisation to show commitment to mentoring, and hence to development. There are few instances where mentors are paid other than token payments, which adds to the value of this study.

2.8 Features of quality mentoring relationships

Respect, trust, emotional intelligence and empathy have been suggested (Kram, 1985/1988; Hall and Kahn, 2002; Chun *et al.*, 2010) as among the key features of quality mentoring relationships, with Bokeno (2009) viewing them as bonds reinforcing and maintaining relationships between learning partners. It could be considered important (Kram, 1985/1988) that mentors have these qualities, while mentoring may be enhanced if both partners have, for example, emotional intelligence (Chun *et al.*, 2010). Informal mentoring relationships are often based on mutual liking and respect (Allen, Day and Lentz, 2005), and trust existing before any mentoring begins (Feldman, 1999; Brechtel, 2003). In the formal setting these affective aspects need to be earned rather than being already present within a mentoring dyad. Training programmes therefore need to emphasise the importance of building relationships (Bierema, 2017) to both mentors and mentees, potentially including earning respect and enabling trust.

Several studies (Gardiner, 1998; Brechtel, 2003; Straus *et al.* 2013) mention the importance of mutual respect within mentoring relationships. Some research (Stanulis and Russell, 2000; Finkelstein *et al.*, 2012) links respect for formal mentors with trust. In their qualitative study Stanulis and Russell (2000) found one mentee believing a lack of respectful behaviour would have damaged the dyad's developing trust; mentees linked trust very strongly to open communication, which without respect is unlikely to develop. Finkelstein *et al.* (2012) argue it is important for formal mentors to earn respect, suggesting it unlikely that mentees would feel comfortable sharing information with someone they did not respect. Their study found that as respect increased so did satisfaction; it seems probable from Finkelstein *et al.*'s (2012) study that early respect in a relationship is more likely to develop into mutual trust and positive outcomes. They note trust should not be assumed to be present in formal relationships, making it worth exploring what factors may enhance the presence of trust in such schemes.

McAllister (1995:25) defines trust as 'the extent to which a person is confident in, and willing to act on the basis of, the words, actions and decisions of another.' Two elements to trust could be considered (Lewis and Wiegert, 1985, cited by McAllister, 1995): affect-based trust and cognition-based trust. Affect-based trust, which Bouquillon *et al.* (2005) see as the deepest form, can develop between two

individuals when strong positive emotions are generated between them. Cognition-based trust occurs due to feeling able to rely on someone's competence and ability (McAllister, 1995). Thus literature (Bouquillon *et al.*, 2005; Cherniss, 2007) suggests trust may be gained when a mentor is not only caring, concerned and open, but also reliable, dependable and competent. If affect-based trust, and to a lesser extent also cognition-based trust within the dyad are high, then the effect on mentoring can be very positive as career support, psychosocial support and role modelling are all more likely (Ghosh, 2014). Hezlett and Gibson (2007) consider mentoring literature has rarely studied trust within mentoring models, but acknowledge that it is included in most descriptions of mentoring.

The importance of trust within the mentoring relationship is reinforced by the identification of trustworthiness as a key characteristic of effective mentors (Hezlett and Gibson, 2007; Straus *et al.*, 2013); trustworthiness depending on perceptions of benevolence, integrity and ability (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995). Trust is vital before open communication can be established or mentee concerns revealed (Wanberg *et al.*, 2003; Buche, 2008; Aspfors and Franssen, 2015). Conversely, appropriate self-disclosure can enable the development of trust (Hall and Kahn, 2002; Wanberg, Welsh and Kammermeyer-Mueller, 2007): self-disclosure by mentor and mentee can have a positive effect because both parties feel trusted (Ghosh, 2014). Cain (2009) suggests that enabling participants to reveal their vulnerabilities encourages movement towards trust and communication, although this process can take time (Mills, Francis and Bonner, 2008) as trust matures over time (Bouquillon *et al.*, 2005). Evidence suggests (Bouquillon *et al.*, 2005) it is important to encourage the development of trust as it influences learning by mentees and reciprocity within the dyad. This may be helped by the culture of an organisation, as trust varies between organisational contexts (Bouquillon *et al.*, 2005).

The development of trust within a mentoring dyad can be important as it enables challenges to be made within a safe environment (Daloz, 2012). The presence of safety, or support, and challenge, and the balance between these, can have a powerful developmental influence (English and Sutton, 2000; Harrison *et al.*, 2006), and formal mentors and mentees need to be able to create them. Being overt within a formal programme about the need for mentees and mentors to communicate and explore how trust could be built, could be beneficial in helping to form trust (Ensher and Murphy, 2005; Buche, 2008; Cain 2009). It appears that

how the mentor and mentee feel about one another can affect the mentoring relationship; at the very least a 'professional friendship' (Gardiner, 2008:51) between mentor and mentee is vital. An affectionate bond might be considered essential (Bouquillon *et al.*, 2005; Ghosh, 2014).

Other factors affect the development of trust. Wanberg *et al.* (2007) suggest trust may be more difficult to build within formal mentoring relationships, reducing their effectiveness, and Bouquillon *et al.* (2005) found trust grew slowly over time in educational contexts. Fleig-Palmer and Schoorman (2011) posit trust as less important in mentoring relationships where mentors are rewarded somehow, as knowledge and skills will be transferred due to other motivations. E-mentoring can impact on the development of trust (Bierema and Merriam, 2002; Zolin and Hinds, 2007; Buche, 2008; Bierema, 2017), and Sinclair (2003) stresses the importance of developing open and trusting mentoring relationships before expecting the same on-line. Colky and Young (2006) point out it is important mentoring relationships are formed quickly in a virtual organisation, particularly where mentoring time is limited.

There is evidence (McKnight, Cummings and Chervany, 1998; Hale, 2000) that high levels of trust can exist even when members of an organisation are strangers, as trust is based on expectations and general knowledge of the organisation. This is supported by ideas about generalised trust (Hezlett and Gibson, 2007), where individuals without much direct contact may trust each other simply because they belong to the same group. Similarities in background and interests may help to speed development of rapport and trust (Cox, 2005b; Wanberg *et al.*, 2006; de Janasz and Godshalk, 2013). Colky and Young (2006:440) refer to 'swift trust' where team members act as if trust is present, which might be transferable to mentoring relationships. Conversely, English and Sutton (2000) found that it was more difficult to establish feelings of safety and trust if mentees and mentors worked for the same organisation. Whether this applies within a dispersed organisation, where there is a workforce but not a workplace is debatable. It is useful to consider what can contribute to positive feelings such as trust and respect developing in a formal, virtual mentoring scheme, with paid mentors and limited time-frames, particularly where the development of individuals is the desired outcome.

2.8a Emotional intelligence and empathy

Emotional intelligence appears particularly important (Chun *et al.*, 2010) for high-quality relationships in formal mentoring, as these involve issues of trust, care and concern. Working as mentors requires awareness of emotional reactions (de Vries *et al.*, 2006). Emotionally intelligent mentors and mentees, who are able to understand, regulate, and constructively use their own and others' emotions, may help overcome potential disparity in formal relationships and develop trust as a foundation for effective mentoring relationships (Cherniss, 2007; Chun *et al.,* 2010). This would be particularly relevant for psychosocial aspects of mentoring (Kram, 1985/1988), as enhancing a mentee's sense of identity and self-worth (Hezlett and Gibson, 2007) involves being aware of her feelings and coping with them. These emotional expectations and bonds between individuals contribute towards trust, as do communication skills (Brown, Daly and Leong, 2009) enabling empathy to be displayed, which is frequently described as essential to mentoring (Kram, 1985/1988; Gardiner, 1998; Alred and Garvey, 2000; Hall and Kahn, 2002; Allen *et al.,* 2009; Brown *et al.*, 2009; Eliahoo, 2016). The ability to empathise is possibly linked with emotional intelligence in mentors (Hall and Khan, 2002), and so could be particularly important with formal mentoring to avoid, or ameliorate, the difficulties of beginning relationships between strangers (Blake-Beard *et al.*, 2007).

Empathic listening, rather than directive (Young and Cates, 2010), may be crucial, particularly for the psychosocial support of mentees (Ragins, 2012). The interrelationship of empathy and trust (Alred and Garvey, 2000) is thought more likely when mentors have encountered similar life experiences to mentees (Cox, 2003), which may be linked to the effects of being alike (Chun *et al.*, 2010). Organisational culture can support or detract from the presence and usefulness of supportive relationships within any organisation (Merrick, 2017). The features of respect, trust, emotional intelligence and empathy are considered to be markers of high-quality mentoring, however, as previous studies identify, not all mentoring achieves this status.

2.9 Features of inferior mentoring

Not all mentoring is beneficial, some can be time-wasting or even damaging (Washington and Cox, 2016). Ehrich *et al.* (2004) consider poor mentoring to be worse than no mentoring. Although both informal and formal relationships can be

inferior, it may be more of an issue with formal mentoring as there may be organisational expectations that a relationship continues (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007) even though it is not beneficial to either party. The term 'toxic mentoring' seems to have been coined in the 1980's in relation to mentoring in nursing, and was examined by Feldman (1999) in relation to both mentor and mentee behaviour, and the subsequent effects on both parties. The Feldman overview (1999) mostly related to informal mentoring, although he did occasionally consider formal mentoring. Behaviour and expectations from either mentor or mentee could lead to dysfunctional relationships (Feldman, 1999). These include either partner not having their needs met, or when long-term costs were greater than benefits, or even sabotage of one by the other.

A simple mismatch of styles can be an issue with formal schemes (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007), although some awkwardness at the beginning of mentoring relationships should perhaps be expected as people become acquainted (Blake-Beard *et al.*, 2007). Ensher and Murphy (2005) consider that formal mentoring frequently does not work effectively, whether from poor structure or matching mechanisms, or inadequate resources. There are opportunity costs, as prospects are limited while mentors and mentees are putting time and energy into mentoring relationships (Hezlett and Gibson, 2007). This is acceptable as long as benefits outweigh costs. One possible cost of formal mentoring to mentors is that scheme coordinators elicit and collect feedback from mentees to evaluate mentors' work (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007; Baker, 2017), which may be included in formal appraisal schemes.

2.10 Current limitations in the extant literature

The literature review has explored arguments around formal, virtual, time-bound and paid-for mentoring and posits there are arguments to suggest a scheme with these elements is less effective than informal, face-to-face, voluntary mentoring relationships with no imposed time-frame. The literature suggests formal mentoring is less effective than informal (Swap *et al.*, 2001; Brechtel, 2003), and there are few insights into mentoring as a paid activity within organisations (Kasprisin *et al.*, 2008; Garvey, 2011). Existing research suggests the quality of mentoring may be challenged where it is of limited duration (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007), and takes place through virtual means (Wanberg *et al.*, 2003; Long *et al.*, 2012).

There is widespread agreement (Clutterbuck, 2010; Terrion and Leonard, 2010; Hamlin and Sage, 2011) that more studies are needed as research on the combination of all these factors is rare, so little precedent is available. Specifically, there is little discussion of mentors being paid; time-limits are occasionally mentioned, but mostly with dyads working face-to-face rather than virtually (Hayes and Scott, 2007; Young and Cates, 2010; Terrion and Leonard, 2010). Cooper *et al.*'s study (2014:47) is the only known example of formal, virtual and paid mentoring, although time scales are difficult to compare as contact varied between dyads and was 'at least fortnightly', so it is unclear how much time was spent in total.

Overall, the literature tends to be dominated by quantitative studies (Allen *et al.*, 2008), although there are more qualitative studies in recent years. However, these rarely feature the voices of both mentees and mentors. As organisations become more global (Stanek, 2001; Matuszek *et al.*, 2008) the need for virtual mentoring will increase, and opportunities for informal mentoring will decrease with geographical spread. Together with the lack of exploration of dispersed organisations these aspects leave a space for examining a scheme that has differing features to the norm; namely formal, virtual, time-bound and paid-for. The various questions and gaps in the literature identified throughout this chapter are summarised in Figure 2.1.

2.11 Summary

Literature from the fields of workplace, educational and healthcare mentoring has been examined, particularly with respect to formal, virtual, paid and time-bound mentoring, concluding that mentoring with these features is less likely to be effective. This critical evaluation identifies the limitations of current understanding of the experiences of formal mentoring schemes in organisations. The next chapter explains the methodological background to the study, with my philosophy and views on research. It explains the methods chosen to investigate the experiences and practices of a mentoring scheme in a dispersed third-sector organisation.

Figure 2.1. The gaps in the literature.

Context of mentoring in general

Does paying for mentoring show commitment and aid development?

Rewarding mentoring
Section 2.7
What effect does payment have here?

Formal
Section 2.5
Does formal mentoring offer less psychosocial support?
What can this scheme say about formal mentoring?

Virtual
Section 2.6
Are email, telephone and videoconferencing suitable for mentoring in dispersed organisations?

Dispersed organisations
Section 2.4
How does mentoring work best?

This study

3rd Sector

What effect do limited time-frames have in this scheme?

Developmental
Section 2.3
What supports developmental mentoring?
How does the deficit model affect perceptions?

Does formal, virtual, paid-for, time-limited mentoring support development?

Features of quality mentoring
Section 2.8
Are trust and respect present in this formal scheme? What factors enhance their presence?

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine approaches to satisfying the research aim and objectives, and will outline the methodology. I will revisit the research aim and objectives and set the methodology and methods within a philosophical context to ensure congruency within my approach. An important element of this research is that I am an insider-researcher, and it is crucial to examine implications associated with this aspect. I will explain who took part in, and what documents informed, the case study. Some considerations of my reflexivity are included in this chapter, with further information in Chapter Six. I will examine how I worked towards making the research as robust as possible, and my approach to ethical considerations.

The research aim for this study is to explore how a formal, virtual mentoring programme, with paid mentors working in a limited time-frame, can support self-employed birth and parenthood education practitioners in their professional development in a dispersed third-sector organisation, which is NCT. Four objectives arise from this aim. My first objective is to critically review literature relating to mentoring, across certain relevant sectors, specifically in relation to formal, virtual, paid and time-bound mentoring. Chapter Two evaluated extant research, particularly relating to the specified features. A second objective is, through a single case-study approach, to explore the practices and experiences of mentoring within a dispersed third-sector organisation. This is addressed within this chapter where I outline the methods used in the exploration of these practices and experiences, and in Chapter Four where an analysis of findings is presented. The third objective focuses on analysing the single case study data, derived from in-depth interviews and documentary evidence, in relation to existing literature, and this is presented in Chapter Five. The final objective is to contribute to existing theoretical knowledge and understanding, and professional mentoring practice, specifically in relation to how formal, virtual, paid and time-bound mentoring can be developmental within a dispersed organisation and this is achieved in Chapters Five and Six.

3.2 Research philosophy and methodology

Research methodology broadly consists of both philosophical assumptions and methods used within the research field (Duberley, Johnson and Cassell, 2012). My assumption is that knowledge comes through human interpretation, and that the reality of mentoring experiences is constructed between the dyad, then filtered through my perceptions and interpretations (Duberley *et al.*, 2012; Ormston *et al.,* 2014). As such my philosophical beliefs stem from a subjectivist or relativist stance (Duberley *et al.*, 2012), with an ontology of interpretivism and an epistemology of constructivism (Crotty, 1998). In a study seeking to understand participants' different experiences of mentoring it is important to be aware of the multiple realities or interpretations of events (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), which shapes my approach to the investigation.

Bryman (2012) considers constructionism to be the ontology and interpretivism the epistemology, while Cunliffe (2011) believes subjectivism to be the ontology and interpretivism the epistemology; thus showing the multiplicity, and confusion, of stances in this area (Jones *et al.*, 2014). Differences between constructionism and constructivism have been discussed (Crotty, 1998), although some believe they mean the same thing (Bryman, 2012). Crotty (1998) allows for a qualitative researcher to be both a constructionist and constructivist, although he states researchers should be clear about implications for their research. Constructionism focuses on the collective generation and transmission of meaning, while constructivism focuses on the meaning-making activity of individuals (Crotty, 1998). Which of these is most relevant to a consideration of mentoring is difficult to tease out. The meaning-making of individuals is clearly relevant to mentees and mentors, but transmitted meanings may well be influenced by the milieu in which mentoring takes place (Crotty, 1998).

Here, the focus on the development NCTPs experience through mentoring suggests a constructivist leaning, although the context of NCT may introduce constructionist elements. As this context will have a significant impact on the data, and will be important in interpreting that data, the methodology is a case study approach (Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2014; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Yin (2014) finds that the relativist perspective fits well with the multiple meanings within a case study.

<u>3.3 Research design: case study</u>

The need for case study research comes from the 'desire to understand complex social phenomena' (Yin, 2014:4), and is a valuable method when asking how or why questions (Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2014). Mentoring is accepted as a complex social action (Garvey and Alred, 2008; Eliahoo, 2016), suggesting the case study approach is appropriate. Case study research is described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as methodology, by Yin (2014) as method, and by Jones *et al.* (2014) as a unit of analysis and methodology; however Thomas (2011:9) suggests it is not a method, but a 'focus on one thing, looked at in depth and from many angles.' These many angles need to be carefully captured, with understanding of how these different meanings will illuminate the topic (Yin, 2014). What is usually agreed on is the need for delineating a case with a boundary (Jones *et al.,* 2014), Merriam and Tisdell (2016) go so far as to say that without an intrinsic boundary it is not a case. The boundary in this research is the mentoring scheme within NCT, a clearly delineated programme with a specific number of participants. Yin (2014:34) mentions 'spatial, temporal and other concrete boundaries', the temporal one is easy to define as the scheme has existed only since early 2012. The spatial boundary is less obvious as NCT is a dispersed organisation, although this study is confined to the UK. The presence of these boundaries, plus the character of mentoring as a complex phenomenon (Yin, 2014) indicate the suitability of NCT mentoring as a site for a case study approach. Contextual material around NCT that provides a background for this case study appears in Appendix 1.

Clutterbuck (2017) considers it is through case studies that insight is achieved into what actually works, particularly with reference to planned mentoring. Case studies can result in 'a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon' (Merriam, 2009:51), although this necessitates gaining evidence about the case from differing directions (Thomas, 2011), with methods and sources of data used to look at relationships and processes within the bounded situation. Yin (2014) sees the ability of a case study to cope with this variety of evidence as an important strength. This case study draws upon a mixture of data sources (Yin, 2014), including 'phenomenological interviews' (Roulston, 2010:16; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016:113) with mentees and mentors, and documentation of mentoring

development and procedures, including reports on mentee evaluations from previous years. The interviews aim to elicit participants' experiences, both by asking questions and using researcher-selected images as 'visual as prompt' (Woodhouse, 2012:21). Images can evoke a different kind of information from participants, due to the way the brain processes different stimuli (Harper, 2002). Access is needed to varying kinds of data to carry out a case study (Yin, 2014), and status as an insider-researcher can enhance this access (Chavez, 2008).

3.4 The insider-researcher

Outsider-researchers could be defined as those who do not have existing knowledge of a setting and the people being researched (Hellawell, 2006), and thus insider-researchers by extrapolation have that existing knowledge. Hellawell (2006) sees insider-outsider as a spectrum rather than a dichotomy. It is possible a researcher is never a complete insider as participants may be strangers, or an unfamiliar part of an organisation could be studied (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). This could be seen as being a 'partial insider' (Chavez, 2008:475) which would characterise my position within NCT's mentoring scheme. I am an insider to NCT, I am a practitioner, an EP and a mentor, and I tutor (train) and coordinate mentors. However I am not involved in day-to-day mentoring activities, and I know few mentees (detailed in Figure 3.1).

Due to the dispersed nature of NCT I am not familiar to others in the way that employees in a workplace might be; this is a complication in considering the effect of being an insider-researcher, and I have found no research to clarify this position. However, Hellawell (2006:489) considers 'insiderism' to be linked with empathy rather than distance or closeness and I certainly empathise with the work mentees and mentors are involved with. Both participant and researcher may treat one another as an insider or outsider within an interview as they shift perspectives in social and other aspects (Chavez, 2008) along the insider-outsider continuum (Hellawell, 2006). Chavez (2008) concludes insider status is neither complete advantage nor total disadvantage. There are, however, ethical issues, including power, involved in my partial insider status which require me to be reflexive; examined below in section 3.9.

There is debate (Rooney, 2005; Brannick and Coghlan, 2007; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Greene, 2014) around whether insiders can produce trustworthy research. Insiders' views are possibly affected by 'subjectivities' (Rooney, 2005:5) or 'blindness' (Chavez, 2008:475); they may assume too much rather than probing deeply, or think they already know answers to questions (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). Existing relationships can affect how participants and researchers relate (Chavez, 2008), which could make it more difficult to avoid exploitation (Tietze, 2012) as the line between interview and conversation can be hard to define. This risk may be ameliorated by the lack of informal meeting places such as 'coffee or photocopy machine' (Tietze, 2012:58) in dispersed organisations. Insider-researchers may feel bound ethically to participants in a way that outsiders would not (Chavez, 2008). To avoid these pitfalls this study, including the interview guide, was discussed in detail with supervisors.

Having dual roles can be an issue for insider-researchers as roles are hard to separate (Tietze, 2012). Whichever role an individual inhabits at any point (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007), participants in the research cannot forget other roles (Hawkins, 1990). It felt crucial to overtly acknowledge this to participants at the beginning and end of interviews. Researchers may need to shift roles meaning openness is important (Greene, 2014), and to reflect on this openness. It was important to note when my identity shifted during interviews, and I did this openly with participants, as discussed in section 3.9. It was vital to be reflexive about my previous relationships with some of the participants and be open about this, both with them and in Figure 3.1.

Chavez (2008) considers any assumptions about the insider position as theoretical rather than proven risks. Insider-research may bring benefits; Brannick and Coghlan (2007:72) conclude it is 'not only valid and useful but also provides important knowledge about what organizations are really like', which may be difficult to ascertain with other methods. What an insider understands is potentially as valid as what anyone else understands, even though it is likely to be different (Durand and Chantler, 2014). Insiders can understand on cognitive, emotional, and practical levels, and gain access more easily than others may manage, including awareness of undocumented historical knowledge (Chavez, 2008; Taylor, 2011; Tietze, 2012). For example, where significant conversations were not formally

documented at NCT planning meetings, I can fill in some gaps in documentation from my recollections.

Insider-researchers may have a rapport with participants, enhancing the generation of data in ways not possible for outsiders (Roulston, 2010). For example, when an antenatal teacher spoke about her work, I understood her references and context. Drawing on shared values and language to enable interpretation of participants' meanings (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007) can be crucial; researchers can use their experience when interviewing, following up questions more effectively, and therefore producing richer data. As all researchers interpret others' experiences through their own understandings (Thomas, 2011), there is much to gain from the insider's viewpoint of experiences. Jones *et al.* (2014) even recommend developing an insider's view of the context and culture to work well with participants, noting the difficulty of gaining access without this status.

There may be advantages to considering strategies to overcome any issues with insider status. Chavez (2008:490) advocates 'vigilant critical reflection on the effects of insiderness' – researchers need to be aware of similarities and differences with any participant's views. It is important to separate out what is learned from what is already known (Chavez, 2008), as is maintaining an audit trail (Greene, 2014). Greene (2014:8) also advocates 'peer debriefing', sharing findings with colleagues to enable critical-thinking and acknowledging feelings; this has been happening on a regular basis between students on the DCaM programme. Supervisors play an important role in aiding reflexivity, by asking questions and challenging thoughts and decisions.

3.5 Participants

Participants were current, or prior, mentees or mentors in NCT's formal scheme. Two practitioners I had mentored prior to the scheme volunteered for pilot interviews. Jones *et al.* (2014) stress the need for information-rich participants to enable in-depth understanding, while allowing for different views of the word sample in qualitative research. Roulston (2010:81) advocates 'selected' rather than 'sampled', with respect to participants. The way of selecting participants is often termed purposeful (Jones *et al.*, 2014)

or purposive (Robson, 2011). Jones *et al.* (2014) argue that a stronger rationale than just convenience must be used for selecting participants, although they recognise researchers' limits of time and resource availability. These limits may prevent sampling 'to redundancy' (Jones *et al.*, 2014:114), precluding a full exploration of the data even though the selection of participants has been comprehensive (Roulston, 2010).

As the focus of the study was to explore the views of both mentors and mentees, a purposeful selection strategy was adopted: every mentor, and all mentees still allowing contact by NCT, were invited to participate. Invitations went to fourteen mentors, and 165 mentees (from over 200 who had then been through the scheme). Mentees leaving NCT had contact details removed from databases, prohibiting contact. The email was sent by NCT's Research Engagement Officer (REO) to avoid any potential appearance of coercion (Qu and Dumay, 2011) if I had made the initial contact, particularly to mentors. The number of participants needed was not fixed before the research began (Jones *et al.,* 2014); I initially wanted a minimum of twelve participants due to suggestions this can be a sufficient sample (Bryman, 2012; O'Reilly and Parker, 2012). It would have been theoretically possible to include all invitees, as every dyad potentially had different experiences. Overall, my aim was to seek a variety of experiences. Pragmatism ensured the acceptance of all volunteers, and to begin negotiations to find suitable times and places for interviews. The dispersed nature of the organisation dictated travelling to meet participants – a contrast to the actual mentoring scheme, which is carried out virtually (i.e. by telephone, email or videoconferencing). I considered using videoconferencing instead of travelling, as this would have reduced time commitment (and costs); however, the pilot interview conducted via Skype was challenging due to slow broadband, and image use was restricted. Communication and transcription was difficult, and therefore Skype was not a practical option.

Twenty-seven NCTPs responded to the initial email from NCT's REO, although one withdrew almost immediately, one had to cancel for family reasons, and one did not respond to follow-up emails. Ultimately, there were twenty-four participants – seventeen mentees and seven mentors. The seventeen mentees had worked with a total of nine mentors; five of those mentors were participants in the study. Fourteen participants were, or

had been, within dyads, although to maintain confidentiality, I did not reveal their mentoring partner's participation in the study. A summary of relationships between mentees and mentors is shown in Figure 3.1; also indicated, to highlight reflexivity, is whether I knew mentees prior to the study. Both pilot interviews, with previous mentees of my own, are included for clarity. Participating mentors are denoted by PM1, PM2 and so on, and mentees are denoted by ovals showing pseudonyms. Mentors are not denoted by pseudonym here as this might compromise their anonymity. Any mentees in the study with non-participating mentors, are shown in relation to those mentors denoted M1, M2 and so on.

Figure 3.1 Relationships between mentees and mentors, and the researcher.
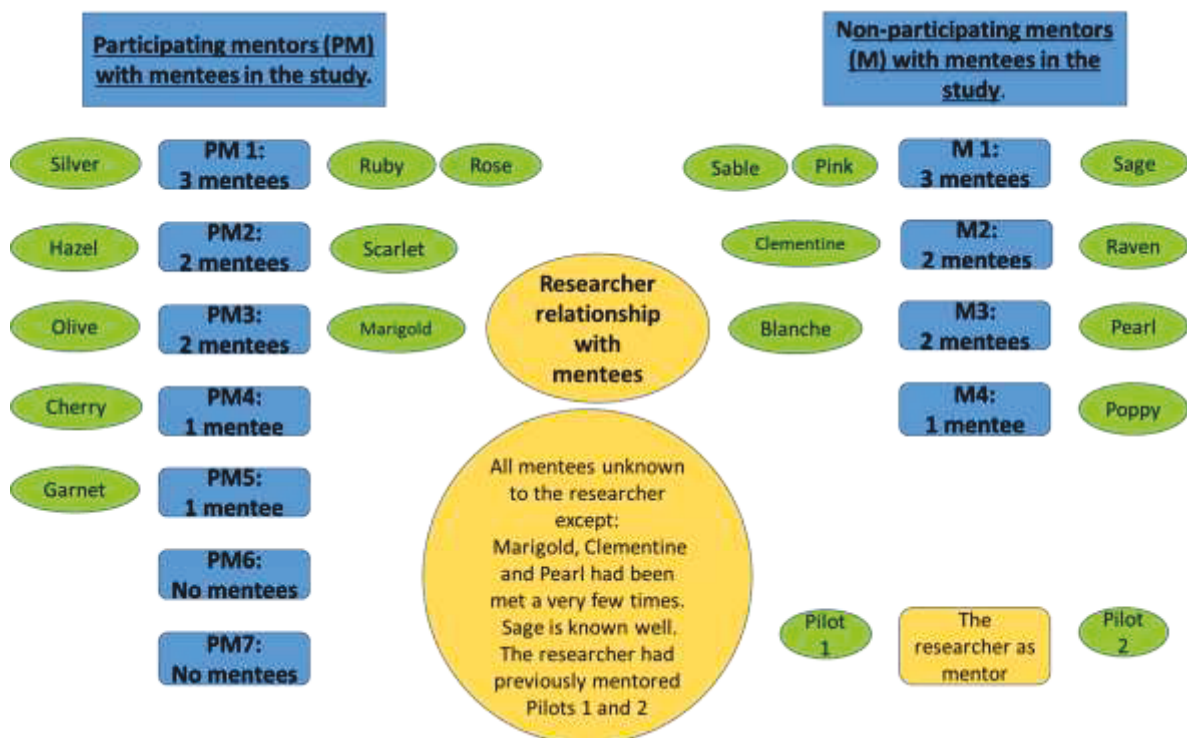
Table 3.1 displays participants by pseudonym, showing their age-range and when they began training. For mentees, what type of mentee and whether they were still being mentored at the time of the interview is included. I interviewed participants between March and December 2016, in twenty-two different locations from West Yorkshire to Hampshire, Wales to East Anglia. All participants are female, and mothers. All are referred to as 'practitioners'

rather than by their specialism within the thesis, and geographical locations are not given in Table 3.1 to maintain confidentiality. Of the participant mentors, five were antenatal teachers, one was a breastfeeding counsellor and one was a postnatal practitioner. Mentees comprised thirteen antenatal teachers (eight of whom were existing or prior probationers), two breastfeeding counsellors and two postnatal practitioners. Four interviews took place in borrowed offices in two city locations, five were in cafés and fifteen in participants' homes.

Table 3.1: Summary of participants.

Pseudonym	**Age range**	**Started training**	**Mentor or mentee** (For type – see below table)	**Ongoing or past mentee?**
Amber	41-50	2001	Mentor	
Crystal	41-50	2002	Mentor	
Coral	41-50	2000	Mentor	
Emerald	31-40	2007	Mentor	
Lavender	Over 50	2007	Mentor	
Jade	41-50	2006	Mentor	
Sienna	Over 50	2005	Mentor	
Blanche	31-40	2007	Mentee V	Past
Cherry	41-50	2014	Mentee NQ/Prob	Ongoing
Clementine	Over 50	2011	Mentee PDS	Past
Garnet	41-50	2006	Mentee V	Past
Hazel	41-50	1999	Mentee PDS	Past
Marigold	31-40	2013	Mentee NQ/Prob	Ongoing
Olive	41-50	2014	Mentee NQ/Prob	Ongoing
Pearl	31-40	2007	Mentee NQ/Prob	Ongoing
Pink	41-50	2012	Mentee NQ/Prob	Past
Poppy	41-50	2014	Mentee NQ/Prob	Ongoing
Raven	31-40	2013	Mentee NQ/Prob	Past
Rose	41-50	2014	Mentee NQ/Prob	Ongoing
Ruby	41-50	2012	Mentee NQ/Prob	Past
Sable	41-50	2010	Mentee PDS	Past
Sage	41-50	2011	Mentee V	Past
Scarlet	41-50	2011	Mentee PDS	Past
Silver	Over 50	2004	Mentee PDS	Past

Types of mentee.
V: volunteer working with mentor-in-training.
NQ/Prob: either a newly-qualified practitioner, or one in her probationary year
PDS: post-difficult situation: complaint, difficult assessment, or other issue (e.g. health)

3.6 Data collection methods

Qualitative methods were chosen for this single case study because I was interested in the lived experience of participants in the mentoring scheme. The most effective way to explore people's experiences, meanings, perceptions and interpretations (Cunliffe, 2011) was by interviewing them (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), using images to stimulate reflections (Woodhouse, 2012). Interviews were supplemented and contextualised by documentary evidence from the organisation

3.6a Interviews

Advantages of interviewing as a data collection method include being a 'flexible and adaptable way of finding things out' (Robson, 2011:280), which can be useful, bringing new insights for both participants (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Interviews may enable participants to reflect more deeply on their experiences, and offer opportunities for feedback afterwards. Disadvantages include the many challenges to being an effective interviewer, with Jones *et al.* (2014) commenting on active listening being exhausting, and needing skill and preparation. Researchers must avoid asking leading questions that show their assumptions; instead, participant and researcher should create meaning together (Jones *et al.*, 2014), more consistent with a constructivist viewpoint. During interviews people often do not speak freely (Robson, 2011), or truthfully (Roulston, 2010), or they say what they think the researcher wants to hear (Alvesson and Ashcraft, 2012). Researchers listen through their own interpretations (Bolderston, 2012), and either party could become distracted (Jacob and Furgerson, 2012), particularly in public places like cafés where several interviews occurred. Inherent power differences between participants within interviews need careful management to avoid exploiting interviewees or influencing responses (Qu and Dumay, 2011; Bolderston, 2012). When interviewing participants, it is necessary to reflect on how the interviewer, or other factors (e.g. being in a café), may have influenced the collected data (Qu and Dumay, 2011). I had to 'appear genuinely naïve about the topic' to offer interviewees an opportunity to speak openly (Yin, 2014:111) which was difficult, given my background within the scheme.

Researching in an all-female context drew me to Roulston's principles (2010), which are written from a feminist perspective, and were useful. These involve having an ethical, non-exploitive, sincere relationship with participants. Even though this women-only study does not espouse a feminist viewpoint, these principles were worth adopting. Balancing a curiosity to find out what participants had to say with an interview that would not offer a data overload (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) led to a semi-structured format (Roulston, 2010), which provided guidance with enough flexibility to enable the following-up of participants' thoughts. Questions were formulated from literature to meet the aim of the research and the specific objective to explore participant experiences. For example, it appears trust is important in formal, virtual schemes (Gardiner, 1998; Alred and Garvey, 2000; Beirema and Merriam, 2002; Hall and Kahn, 2002; Hudson, 2016), leading to questions on whether mentees and mentors perceived trust. Another question was whether mentoring was proving developmental for participants (Ragins and Verbos, 2007; Orland-Barak and Hasin, 2010; Haggard *et al.*, 2011; Eby 2012). Appendix 4 shows the interview guide with the literature stimulating each question.

Two pilot interviews were held, both with practitioners I had previously mentored. With their permission, these were recorded and transcribed to inform the study. Pilot interviews can provide feedback about the clarity and sequencing of questions, and whether they are eliciting useful information (Jones *et al.,* 2014). This was only partially successful as I had mentored both interviewees prior to the official scheme, so some questions were not relevant. These pilot interviews were useful in establishing that I occasionally tried to finish people's sentences, (Baxter-Magolda and King, 2007). They also enabled the surfacing of my assumptions about the quality of NCT mentors: one interviewee spoke about presuming NCTPs to have certain skills and abilities due to training and practice. Both expected NCT mentors to have more effective listening skills than those encountered in other areas. I agreed, but on reflection I realised these had been major assumptions. The idea of 'NCT-ness' (section 4.1b) arose from the first pilot interview and fed into the main study, becoming a separate question. I also assumed only satisfied mentees would volunteer to participate, partly because this had been raised as a risk by peers and supervisors prior to the study. Finding this was not the case (Raven, Olive, Poppy) was

reassuring, as the study is thus more likely to be an appropriate reflection of the mentoring scheme rather than being inclined towards positive experiences.

Jones *et al.* (2014) argue that the case study researcher is interested in facts and opinions so interviews need to be semi-structured and in depth. Interviewers are encouraged to develop a rapport with participants (Jacob and Furgerson, 2012), involving active listening and using basic counselling skills to encourage people to share their stories: skills I possessed through NCT training. Interviews lasted an average of an hour, varying from around forty minutes to one hour forty minutes; they were recorded and transcribed. A guide was used for questioning, and a number of images were selected by participants. These images (discussed in section 3.7b; shown in Appendix 9) were to stimulate participants' reflections around mentoring, leading to a discussion of the significance of each one to their experiences. I frequently departed from the guidance by following up something the participant had said, to deepen her reflections on an image or to guide her back to the task in hand where needed.

It proved difficult to be organised with recording equipment and to find places offering enough peace and privacy to record interviews (Roulston, 2010). Some participants welcomed being interviewed at home, others did not, or lived too far from a station. It was difficult to conduct interviews in noisy cafés and to transcribe accurately afterwards, although it was the only workable solution (Roulston, 2010) for five interviews as Skype had been ruled out.

3.6b Visual research

Interviews included an element of 'visual as prompt' (Woodhouse, 2012:21), where researcher-sourced images stimulated discussion, for several reasons. Within NCT, using images to elicit reflections is a familiar method, thus it was expected to help people feel comfortable. Harper (2002) describes how images can elicit different kinds of information due to the different way a brain processes visual material. Using images enables a focus on something tangible which may increase people's comfort levels (Rowley, 2012). The power dynamics in an interview may shift when using images (Harper, 2002; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Van Auken, Frisvoll and

Steward, 2010; Pain, 2012); any subsequent reduction of power imbalance was valuable given my roles within the organisation. In my experience, methods using images are not used in mentoring research, thus offering a distinctive data collection opportunity.

3.6c Documents

Documents in this case study were included as they were part of the research setting and, as such, sources of data in qualitative research (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Documents were selected to review the development of the mentoring scheme within NCT. The documentation review examined the espoused purpose of the scheme and its congruence with historical documents and plans. I considered documents alongside the interview data to increase the richness of the case study.

Documents can form a part of the data collected in a research study in order to use different data sources and methods to corroborate findings, which is appropriate to qualitative case studies as they establish a context for the study (Bowen, 2009). There are advantages to document analysis: efficiency, availability, cost-effectiveness, not being affected by the research process, and, as a product of the context, they are grounded in the world being investigated (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2014; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). However, they may provide insufficient detail or be incomplete, and are not always easy to find, which can produce a bias of selectivity as well as the possibility of a biased author (Yin, 2014); they can also distance the researcher from real people (Miller and Alvarado, 2005). Bowen (2009) concludes these flaws are outweighed by the advantages of using documents. Even so, documents cannot be treated as a complete record of events (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2014). Researchers need to establish a document's author, the reason it was originally written, and the intended audience for each one (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2014). This information is summarised in Table 3.2 below, along with the type and number of documents found, and the date range during which documents had been produced, and is expanded upon in Appendix 5. Eighty-two documents, comprising 448 pages, were found and examined for this study. All documents are identified with a capital D and the date they were written, i.e. Dyymmdd.

A purposeful (Miller and Alvarado, 2005) review of documents in my records and NCT's intranet document system produced documents relating to:

- planning for Education and Practice initiatives (14),
- wider NCT (e.g. publicity material or current organisational charts) (2),
- development of the mentoring scheme, including a discussion of the definition of NCT mentoring (12),
- mentoring processes, including how mentoring fits into overall NCT quality and support systems, existing annual reports on the scheme, an evaluative report carried out after the first two years of operation (including evaluations from mentees), and further collated mentee evaluations (36),
- meetings relevant to mentoring (agenda and minutes for two committees) (18).

Day (2012) suggests issues of power mean my interpretations can present a certain picture, particularly as I authored, or at least drafted, many of the mentoring scheme process documents. However, all process and definition documents have been through peer and management review so they reflect an NCT stance, rather than solely mine. My access to the selected documents is a result of my insider status in NCT and was therefore subject to NCT's ethical approval process.

Table 3.2: Summary of documents.

Type of document	No. found	Date range	Source/s or author/s	Significance; audience
General NCT Education and Practice (or NCT College); wider NCT	14	28.01.12 – 06.09.16	Head of NCT Education (later College)	Development of mentoring as an integral part of the work of the department; tutors and wider NCT management;
Wider NCT	2	09.12 - 19.7.17	NCT / HR	Publicity; HR (organisational chart)
Mentoring development	12	17.02.12 – 30.07.13	Mainly CE as mentoring coordinator; also HR department	Path of development from integral part of L6 module to stand-alone in house programme; tutors and wider NCT management
Mentoring processes	36	24.09.13 – 21.06.17	Mainly CE as mentoring coordinator; also mentors and QAS members	Embedding of mentoring within NCT processes and development of scheme; all NCT practitioners and students, wider NCT management, mentoring students and mentors, and mentees.
Documents from Course Management Committee (CMC)	4	18.9.12 - 28.11.13	CMC and Head of NCT Education	Establishment of this committee with overview of mentor training and deployment; wider NCT management
Documents from SIP, QAT, QaS (see below)	14	9.1.13 – 29.03.16	QAS, Head of Education, NCT Operations Manager	Ongoing implementation of support and quality assurance strategies and structures including mentoring as integral part of both support and quality assurance; wider NCT management
Total documents: Total number of pages:	82 448			QaS = Quality and Support team; formerly Supporting Individual Practitioners / Quality Assurance Team.

Interviews were transcribed, which involved listening to tapes several times. It is a 'time-consuming and physically demanding task' (Roulston, 2010:105) involving selection and interpretation of meaning (Gillham, 2005). I listened again while reading the transcript to check for anything lost while transcribing (Gibbs, 2007), such as tone of voice or hesitancy in responses. It can be difficult to capture prose that is not entirely grammatical or is in everyday language (Gibbs, 2007; Roulston 2010). My experience of the interviews was that participants rarely used spoken punctuation, so I chose to use a dash (i.e. –) to show pauses or 'um' or 'er' sounds within text, to give an authentic flow to transcripts, increase readability for me, and make transcripts more appealing to participants (Roulston, 2010). Not everyone wished to receive, or appeared to read, their transcript. One participant particularly requested it not be sent as she disliked the sound of herself. Most others only thanked me, although a couple of participants commented on some aspect. Transcripts were then read and re-read to increase familiarity with them.

Thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analysing and reporting themes in data (Braun and Clarke, 2006), was employed to gain an understanding of participants' experiences and of documentation found. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as having six phases, beginning with becoming familiar with the data by immersion in it, through reading and re-reading. First-level descriptive codes are generated. Later codes can be more analytical, beginning to move towards themes – a theme being something that captures an important aspect about the data in relation to the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Codes and data need to be read and considered to search for relevant themes (Bowen, 2009), which need reviewing in the light of further reading and reflection. Once themes are selected, they need to be defined and named. Finally, from all this, a report is produced (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The twenty-four interviews, plus the pilot interviews, and eighty-two documents produced a considerable amount of data, involving a long and slow analysis process. First-level coding (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was initially written on transcripts (an example is in Appendix 6). Each script was imported to data analysis software (NVivo10), as a tool for managing

large amounts of data (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Documents were coded initially into the NVivo programme. Applying the same codes generated by interviews to documents helped to integrate data collected by different methods (Bowen, 2009). Both documents and transcripts were re-coded with an overview of the level one coding in mind to achieve a higher level, developing seventy-nine categories or nodes along the way (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). Entries for each node were grouped, printed, and then re-read several times to begin to identify themes, which resulted in eleven groupings of nodes; these were then reviewed and discussed with supervisors. Six initial themes were arrived at, which were reviewed again. Finally these were organised into four themes of context, features, and relationships around NCT mentoring, and the development of practitioners (detailed in Appendix 6).

3.8 Quality of research

Qualitative researchers are encouraged to move beyond positivist conceptions of validity and reliability when assessing the quality of qualitative research (Lewis *et al.,* 2014). Tracy (2010) offers an Eight Criteria model for quality to enable an overview of research, and states that truthfulness on the part of a researcher will help towards achieving quality. Tracy (2010) considers working with a worthy topic as important, which the current research achieves. Shenton (2004) includes strategies such as using well-recognised methods to enable high-quality research to be conducted, which would tie in with Tracy's (2010) criteria of rich rigour from using appropriate procedures. A case study is a well-recognised method (Shenton, 2004), and the procedures used to collect and analyse data were appropriate (Tracy, 2010) as interviews enable the exploration of experiences (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015), and documents provide the context for those experiences (Bowen, 2009). Tracy (2010) refers to interesting and significant data from appropriate sources, which has been achieved here. Shenton (2004) recommends triangulating research through different methods and participants, although this notion arguably belongs to a 'neo-positivist' view of research (Roulston, 2010:86). However, the idea of using varied data sources to increase research robustness fits within a case study approach (Yin, 2014).

An audit trail (Roulston, 2010) is essential to enable others to understand the processes in a study, and sincerity is needed (Tracy, 2010) to examine the researcher's impact on that study. The sincerity is achieved through being honest about my own biases and goals and what part they played in the research, examining my impact on the research, and being transparent about the conduct of the research. I kept a reflective journal (Shenton, 2004) which included, for example, careful notes of all coding decisions, along with reasons for each decision. Roulston (2010) recommends addressing one's bias as a researcher by ensuring questions are not leading. I monitored this during interviews and re-formulated questions immediately if they became leading, to attempt to maintain the credibility (Tracy, 2010) of the research. Tracy (2010) also recommends enabling participant voices to emerge as part of establishing credibility, particularly where there are differences of opinion, which I demonstrate in Chapter Four. Tracy (2010) highlights resonance, significant contribution and meaningful coherence as important, which perhaps lie with the reader to ascertain, but in order to invite these I have planned, carried out and reported the research carefully. I have made a significant contribution to theoretical and practical knowledge about how formal, virtual, time-bound and paid-for mentoring can work within dispersed organisations. Perhaps the quality of research overall depends on the ethical behaviour of the researcher (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), which is another of Tracy's Eight Criteria (2010).

3.9 Ethical issues

I have been mindful of ethical behaviour throughout this study, which was conducted in accordance with Oxford Brookes University research guidelines, and was submitted to, and passed by, the University Research Ethics Committee. In addition, the study had to undergo NCT's Research Ethical Approval process, undertaken by the Head of Research and an independent advisor. My removal from the recruitment process was to avoid coercion. A Participant Information Sheet (PIS) accompanied the invitation to enable informed decisions around taking part (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

Anonymity for one group of participants was not assured as mentors are few in number. This was pointed out in the PIS and highlighted further when discussing arrangements for interview (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Jones *et al.*, 2014). Informed consent was obtained from every participant. I emailed a consent form before every interview so participants could read in advance, and took a hard copy to interviews, inviting questions before the form was signed. After the first few interviews had taken place, I realised I needed to re-send a PIS prior to an interview for re-reading, as early interviewees did not recall seeing it. Confidentiality is achieved by measures including using pseudonyms for participants, taking care with demographic information, a password-protected laptop and locked files for transcripts (Robson, 2011).

I needed to be aware of participants potentially finding the subject matter to be sensitive (Braun and Clarke, 2013). During two interviews participants became upset. The first pilot interviewee became emotional; I reflected afterwards that although I was appropriately sympathetic, I should have checked if she was happy to continue. When one participant (Sable) became emotional, I was careful to ascertain she was comfortable to carry on. I was mindful of participants' feelings in other ways too. For Silver and Clementine, revisiting mentoring opened up unpleasant memories, so I emphasised their need to feel safe and not go in an uncomfortable direction, and expressed my appreciation of their willingness to speak openly. I acknowledged Olive and Raven's difficult feelings about mentoring and assured them of my interest in their experiences, no matter what those experiences were. Scarlet and Rose admitted feeling exposed after the interview so I ensured they knew their transcript could be amended (Roulston, 2010), but neither wanted to change anything.

Reflexivity and awareness of power relations were crucial in my role as an insider-researcher (Karnieli-Miller, Strier and Pessach, 2009; Day, 2012). My position as mentor tutor and coordinator of NCT mentoring is impossible to ignore, although I personally felt that researcher-mode was different from tutor-mode, or coordinator-mode, despite being difficult to separate the roles (Hawkins, 1990). Separating roles requires 'a degree of emotional and intellectual flexibility' (Tietze, 2012:60), and perhaps a level of detachment. It seemed sensible to plan to address the issue, with a statement of my role at the beginning of interviews, i.e. that I was there as a

researcher and not as a tutor or coordinator. However, the role varied throughout individual interviews. I used the word 'hat' to express to a participant which role I was in at any time, and acknowledged any variation. I asked participants at the end of each interview if they had felt safe to speak to me, knowing as they did that I was wearing more than one hat. When I realised that I was speaking as a coordinator instead of a researcher this amused some participants (Rose, Ruby), and no one openly seemed to mind; indeed some found it actively useful in gaining information (Cherry, Hazel, Raven). Scarlet thanked me for the work I did as coordinator. Two mentees commented they might have felt awkward if they had wanted to say anything negative, but as they had not, it was not an issue. One said that she would not have been as honest had it not been clear I was not 'checking up' on the mentor's work.

The power imbalance between researcher and researched (Qu and Dumay, 2011; Bolderston, 2012; Day, 2012; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) was potentially exacerbated by my position within NCT and it was important to address this. Power inhabits many different guises and it depends on how it is defined (Day, 2012) and embodied. Although a hierarchical structure does exist within NCT, it tends to exclude people at my level. As only a name to most mentees, it is possible that my roles did not actually influence interviews with them. Most mentors and I share a collegial approach (Bouquillon *et al.*, 2005) despite my roles; they comment on draft documents and share in some decision-making. I used non-work email addresses that did not include my work-titles to contact participants, to further separate the researcher's role from my other roles. I used images in interviews to encourage different power-balances (Harper, 2002; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Van Auken *et al.*, 2010; Pain, 2012), and I was constantly reflexive around my interactions with participants.

3.10 Reflexivity

Using reflexivity, or 'thoughtful, conscious self-awareness,' alters the concept of data collection by recognising how knowledge is actively constructed (Finlay, 2002:532). Reflexivity is valuable to the qualitative researcher, although it is a complex concept with multiple definitions and explanations (Finlay, 2002). An important contribution of reflexivity to the

quality of this research was to enable a consideration of the power issues inherent with the role of the insider-researcher. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) posit that the ubiquitous power relations in life are equally present within research. The potential for power imbalance in this study meant I needed to be very reflexive: very 'aware in the moment' (Dowling, 2006:8) of what affected my internal and external responses, and mindful of my relationship to the research topic as well as the participants. As a prime mover in the foundation of NCT mentoring, it was vital to recognise my own desire to see the scheme succeed and how this might affect my perceptions of the data collected. What I 'see' in the research must be viewed as 'what I think I see' (Day, 2012:64) and I must question my interpretations.

Being reflexive is not easy (Finlay, 2002; Dowling, 2006), and to enhance this, I undertook reflexive writing on the way to and from interviews, noting my state of mind and feelings about each interview and any effect these might have had on the interview process or on the participant. These notes were later typed up and added to as I reflected upon them with hindsight before discussing with my supervisors. Reflexivity is considered further in section 6.7.

3.11 Limitations of the research design

It is important to recognise the limitations of the methodology and methods used in this study. I acknowledge that only mentees still permitting contact by NCT were invited, which might have introduced a positive bias, as those having negative experiences may have left NCT, and so were not invited. I could only speak to those who responded to the invitation, and for the most part, those willing to take part had gained from mentoring and wanted to give something back. Any mentees with a frustrating experience, or those not engaging with mentoring were perhaps less likely to respond to the invitation to take part, although there were three participating mentees who had less than satisfactory experiences. It may be possible that my position within NCT affected what participants said despite my attempts to mediate such concerns through my reflexive stance and using images to balance power issues. However, data in the Mentoring Evaluation Report (D150817) prior to the research study mostly agrees with the findings of mentees' positive experiences. I may be misinterpreting what was said in

interviews (Rooney, 2005), as participants perhaps used a shorthand for their experiences. It also may be a limitation that I have conducted interviews (with one exception) face-to-face. The scheme involves virtual contact, so it may be inauthentic to have not used the same methods. However, as the Skype pilot interview was difficult to hear and hard to transcribe due to connectivity issues, this was a pragmatic decision.

3.12 Summary

This chapter has examined the methodology and methods that have been used to approach this research study. I have acknowledged my position as an insider-researcher, presented my attempts to ensure the rigour of this study, and included an acknowledgement of the limitations of the methods used. The following chapter presents an analysis of the findings from interviews and documentation.

Chapter Four: Presentation of Results

This chapter presents an analysis of the findings from the fieldwork on the NCT mentoring scheme, comprising participants' mentoring experiences, and contextual documentation. Various themes have been selected from my analysis of the data which help to develop a rich understanding of the nature of this formal, virtual, time-bound, paid-for, developmental mentoring scheme. Themes are presented in four sections: the context within which the scheme is held, the features of the scheme, the relationships built by NCT mentees and mentors, and the development that has taken place for
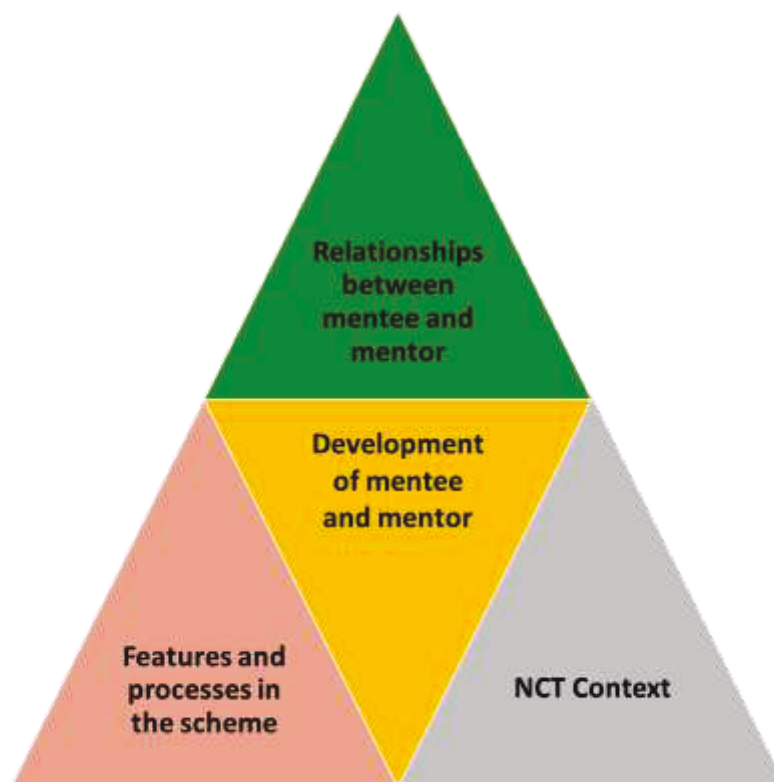
both mentees and mentors (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 Themes

4.1 The NCT organisational context

This section will examine findings relating to the setting for mentoring in NCT, which is a long-standing birth and parenting education and support charity, organising courses and services for people around the transition to parenthood. This context influences how people work together, and is characterised both by a culture of support, and 'NCT-ness' (shared values

and skills, and organisational trust). Finally, the context is affected by the organisation being a dispersed one, i.e. there is a workforce but not a workplace.

4.1a Support within NCT

There is a range of support mechanisms, including mentoring, for students and practitioners within NCT, although more are focused on students, who are supported by personal and academic tutors. Tutorial groups often include students from different years and probationary practitioners, who provide peer support often continuing long after graduation. Students and probationers are also part of working groups (Parent Services Areas: PSA) alongside local practitioners. Each specialism, and each role (assessor, mentor, or supervisor) has a coordinator. A summary (D141001) of NCT-organised support available to practitioners is on the intranet; and there are unofficial online sources of support, sharing issues and resources. This network of encouragement and scaffolding, together with the facilitation of mutual support between parents through NCTPs' work, engenders a culture of support throughout the organisation. It is inevitable that not everyone experiences NCT in the same way, so this may be a generalisation. However, NCT manifested as supportive in some way for everyone within this study, which resonates with personal experience. This support network is clearly presented in documentation, clarifying mentors as only part of practitioner support.

One email (D120730), from NCT's HoEP, explains a mentor is there for practice issues:

> …the tutor and tutorial group are there to support them in more pastoral terms, the mentor is there to work with the [probationer] on particular issues within their practice that arise and to discuss their courses…

NCT tutors perform supervisory and mentoring functions to their students (D120217) that often continue after they become practitioners. The evaluation form for probationary mentees asks if their mentor and tutor supported them differently, and for the most part this was agreed upon. Some mentees felt they were getting sufficient support from tutors and so did not value mentoring, as recorded in the Mentoring Evaluation Report

(D150817). An email exchange with a mentee (D161212) in my role as mentor-coordinator highlights this, as she understood:

> …the process and the purpose, and why it has been introduced, but I would and do more readily use other tutors and local practitioners to gain support.

In the interviews most mentors mentioned probationers being supported by academic and pastoral tutors, peers in tutorial groups, local practitioners, and other practitioners within their specialism. Probationary mentees cited the same sources of support, adding in their families (particularly partners), on-line forums, local NCT branches, and less precise ideas including "anyone who would listen" (Rose).

Other types of mentee also mentioned vague sources of support including "people in the same boat" (Hazel), and "always someone" (Sage). For mentees in post-difficult situations, support levels varied. Clementine felt ashamed of her circumstances; consequently she had not mentioned them to anyone, rendering it impossible for anyone other than her mentor to offer help. Silver began by feeling similarly; attending a local group she thought "I won't make an issue of this I just won't say anything – and then I was directly asked", although she did then acknowledge her difficulties. It was not apparent in the interview whether she had received extra support as a result. For Sable, there was a lot of local support which was very welcome, but did not detract from the value of her mentor's support. As a volunteer mentee, Blanche commented during her training she had "got a lot of the equivalent type of thing from what you get from a mentor from my tutor", but as her tutor had since left NCT, the opportunity to work with a mentor was "particularly timely." Mentees' use of other support is exemplified by Pink, who used an image (Appendix 9, no.44) of mouths to represent the "amazing women" she had met who were "passionate and enthusiastic", and who had "lots to say." Despite this, there is evidence that the support mentors offered to mentees had been an integral part of their development (explored in section 4.4a).

Support offered by mentors

Mentors are part of the provision of support within NCT, and the actuality and perceptions of mentees receiving support is a significant part of how

NCT mentoring works. The aim and objectives of the mentoring scheme (D151013:1) specifically mention support 'towards achieving [mentees'] potential both professionally and personally', and also aiming to reduce isolation for dispersed practitioners. Support was a key word emerging from interviews and documentation, so evidently mentors were providing support, and mentees were appreciating that support. Collations of, and reports around, evaluation forms (D150817; D170314) show this clearly. Mentee responses to the questions 'What were your expectations of mentoring?' and 'Was mentoring useful?' were collated (D170314). These are presented as word clouds (Appendix 7) featuring 'support', 'helpful' and 'helped' as predominant words. In contrast to views suggesting tutor support was sufficient, some evaluation forms included comments 'on the value of having a 'different' or a 'new' or simply 'another' point of view' (D150817:5). The mentor was seen as 'complementary' to the tutor and as having a 'big sister' or a 'peer relationship' (p.6). One mentee felt the mentor helped her to 'step back and review – often resulting in remarkable paradigm shifts' and another felt she was 'much more able to voice deep personal concerns' (p.12) than with her tutor.

Mentors had on-line and teleconference discussions (D170223) around what they meant by support for a mentee, with connotations varying between individuals. Some focused on the skills mentors used, such as active listening and open questions, and some on the safe and private space being provided within mentoring relationships. Others mentioned the core conditions (Rogers, 1967) of unconditional positive regard and empathy. While support is generally seen as widespread in the organisation, albeit meaning different things to the diverse group of practitioners, one mentor identified a sense of asking for support being perceived as a sign of weakness, although this was not recognised by other participants. There were insights into different meanings of support within the interviews and documents. One mentor noted (D170223) that individual perceptions of what support meant implies the need for different understandings of what 'being supportive' is to mentees. Further evidence for this idea of individuality came from a mentee (D150817:12) who noted her mentor had been 'very respectful of my needs' and had 'worked out a way to support me to the best of my ability.' Blanche remarked on how individuality supported practitioner development:

…to develop into a better practitioner – and therefore it can be varied what that means for any individual relationship…it's kind of "what's support to you – you tell me and then we can talk about it".

Other interviewed mentees gave indications as to their perceptions of support. Marigold saw mentoring as positive and helpful:

[She] was very encouraging about what I was – doing – kind of affirming what was going right – you know being helpful about things that I was finding more difficult.

Others saw it as "reassuring" (Rose) or "not feeling alone" (Clementine). For Garnet it was having someone who was "nurturing" which she related to women supporting each other with "friendship – and warmth" (explored in section 4.3a). Mentees (D170314) mentioned mentors 'helping to think through' some of the issues (p.3) or difficulties (p.2), or when facing 'challenges' (p.5).

Mentors were evidently aware of differences between practical and emotional support (D170223), and mentees needing either, or both, and felt it their responsibility to ascertain those needs. Mentees saw this variation in their support needs too. Blanche spoke about help with either emotional or practical needs. This was echoed by Cherry talking about "support or help – guidance – advice – that sort of thing", and by several mentee evaluation forms (D170314:2), for example, 'I hoped it [mentoring] would offer me emotional support and practical advice.' Garnet had felt mentoring would be different:

[It was] going to be a lot more about the practical aspects of my work – rather than – say emotional development but [inaudible] that does feel right.

There was also recognition of support as being listened to by mentees. One mentee spoke about being able to 'voice deep personal concerns', and another mentioned she valued 'someone to listen while I gather my thoughts in my busy life' (D150817:12). Pink remembered support from her mentor as "broad brushed" in that:

…they're not telling you the answers they're asking you the right questions to find the answers yourself – or if not find the answers then to manage the situation or the problem or the issue yourself…

An image of a lighthouse in a stormy sea (no.11) helped Pink expand further by relating early days of facilitating courses to "stormy waters" and

her mentor being the "nice strong rock and lighthouse that can offer you a bit of support – and a place to just go aargh I don't understand!" Her mentor was a "protected place" and a "calm in the storm" in the midst of "crazy weather". Pearl referred to mentoring as a "safety net" more than anything practical, "just knowing that there were people who were being paid to support me", relating to rewarding mentoring (section 4.2a).

NCTPs often need support, particularly probationers who are facing the actuality of working with people at a vulnerable stage of life who can encounter difficult situations. Practitioners work with people who may have, or have had, tragic events such as a baby, or a partner dying. They encounter people with challenging views on parenting about which they need to be respectful and non-judgemental. These issues are extra to existing life-stresses, of juggling NCT and other work, studying, and volunteering, along with any children they might have. Coral commented on these stresses:

> …I've worked with people where their marriage has broken up – people where they've lost their other employment – I've had someone who'd suffered multiple bereavements in the months leading up to [needing mentoring].

Circumstances such as a client complaint prompting mentoring to be offered can lead to strong feelings, including distress and defensiveness. NCTPs often need support to cope with such feelings. This support appears to have enabled learning and development in some situations. As one mentee (D150817:12) said:

> Thank you very much for helping me to reflect on all this…really helps me untangle how I'm feeling about it all and also helps me form an action plan. I have learnt so much from you and it will help me in future too.

Some interviews support this. Sable considered the emotional and psychological support from her mentor had enabled her to know she "could – I could do it." There were costs to mentors; Coral warned of the dangers of being overwhelmed by the "storm of emotions that we're encountering", observing that mentors needed to be "careful that we don't jump to conclusions". It was necessary for mentors to be able to hold the space for mentees, as Crystal pointed out, but with:

> …sufficient boundaries that they're not lying awake in the middle of the night stressing about – people because it could – if you get a difficult one – it can start to sort of – take over your life a bit…

If mentees had sufficient time to move past these feelings, the risk then is they have "had a lot to stew on" (Coral) with no support from mentors to focus on constructive or positive aspects of practice. Alternatively, being over the emotional storm could mean readiness to move forwards.

Some mentees did not want mentoring support, perhaps because they did not choose it, which Sable could understand. She commented she was:

> …aware I needed [mentoring] – and I was relishing the support…if someone was having to have it in a compulsory way – perhaps – they wouldn't be so open minded…

The idea of mentoring being, or being perceived as, compulsory is discussed further in relation to formal mentoring in section 4.2c. Despite appreciating the support she received from her mentor, Poppy did not see that support as significant as she did not "choose her". However, this was not about selecting a mentor, but rather having one at all. Poppy felt that:

> …I don't need that – but because there's a lot of support out there…that's what you want your mentor to be for you…someone to be of support to you – and I honestly look elsewhere for that.

Other mentees also felt this way, particularly Olive: her mentor being a stranger was a significant issue. This was echoed by an evaluation form (D160315) that said the mentee was 'quite apprehensive about receiving support from a new, unknown person'. This was rare within both documents and interviews. Knowing mentors were NCTPs seemed to enable most mentees to be comfortable with being mentored by a stranger, which emerged from the theme I quickly termed 'NCT-ness'.

4.1b 'NCT-ness'

This theme emerged from the first pilot interview and although it was not universal, the majority of interviewees recognised it and found it significant. From participant responses it appeared to be based on three major elements. The first was the importance of shared values, particularly being passionate about supporting parents, in facilitating strangers to work together. Another factor was the skills all practitioners should possess,

enabling expectations of behaviour. The third appeared as organisational trust, in that working for NCT meant something specific. There was also a minor aspect of an attitude to time, which will be examined in section 4.2b.

The first pilot interviewee expressed the idea that NCTPs would have certain skills. NCT mentors could therefore be expected to be particularly skilled as they have to be EPs before being eligible to apply for mentor training. This first pilot interviewee expected NCT mentors to be "more – psychologically emotionally adept…than a mentor in another organisation" as it was likely that others would "probably not have that kind of listening skills type background". NCT mentors would "explore" rather than "tell". However, she did not use the phrase 'NCT-ness' to sum up what she was describing. Between the first and second pilot interview my reflections led me to formulate this phrase, and to incorporate it in the interview questions when asking about trust. At least, I believed I had formulated the phrase. In researching documents I found notes from a teleconference (D120217:2) where the phrase was used while planning the new programme of study. It is not recorded who said it, but it was agreed there was a 'general worry that we would lose our 'NCT-ness'' if training was adapted in a certain way.

So the concept of 'NCT-ness' was in my knowledge, even if it was long forgotten and therefore only in my subconscious. Apart from this one reference, no other written mention of the term was found. After the first pilot interview, 'NCT-ness' was included in interview questions (detailed in Appendix 4). Interestingly, several participants mentioned it before being asked about it, with most people agreeing it was an intangible feeling. Pearl expressed it as being:

> …that's what I love about NCT – that people are willing to go that extra mile to support each other – the NCT community.

Each of the three concepts within 'NCT-ness' – shared values, shared skills and the idea of organisational trust – within an organisation that promoted development and encouraged support will be considered below.

Shared NCT values

The shared values of NCT were evident between participants and included working for the benefit of parents and an acceptance of confidentiality.

Fees for NCTPs are not high, and work is limited due to unsocial hours, so money is unlikely to be a major attraction. As Crystal said:

> I wonder if – we're all a certain breed in the first place – those of us who are attracted to working for NCT…whatever we're doing we're all doing it for parents…improving parents' experience so that's the NCT-ness of it I suppose…we must all have a drive a desire to want to change things.

There were expectations about shared passions (Raven) around birth and early parenthood and similar core values (Pink). Sable highlighted shared values with her mentor by saying they were of "an ilk", that they were "cut from the same cloth…on a number of levels."

One value generally acknowledged was confidentiality. All NCT work is confidential, as long as people show no risk to themselves or others. Amber and Pink just "expected" confidentiality; Poppy knew that "the people who work in [NCT] have it embedded in them", and Garnet said:

> …so as a [practitioner]…you are just trustworthy you wouldn't say anything to anybody about any of your clients.

All interviewed mentees acknowledged their work with mentors remained within the dyad, helping to promote an open and safe atmosphere. Several evaluation forms also mentioned this as a benefit, including where confidentiality allowed one mentee 'to really open up and get support where I needed it' (D170314:8). These values, common amongst practitioners, together with expectations of shared capabilities from being NCT trained, led to an appreciation of their shared skills, the second aspect of 'NCT-ness'.

Shared skills

Shared skills is another element of 'NCT-ness' in the findings; as a concept it is related to the connections considered in section 4.3a. Mentees knowing that mentors possessed certain skills enabled a level of expectations; mentors had "been where [mentees] are", as Jade commented. These skills include being able to listen effectively, being reflective and empathic, and using active learning techniques. As Scarlet pointed out, NCTPs did things in a measured way:

…because we've had all this training…so we're all very good at the listening and…trying to draw things out from people…you're being listened to in an NCT way…more sort of emotionally intelligent way of doing it.

Sable summarised skills her mentor possessed as "fantastically honed listening skills" and as being "extremely reflective in her personality". Listening skills and reflective practice are elements emphasised across all education and practice within NCT. Coral noted reflective skills were fundamental in practitioner training, and Crystal mentioned that:

…it's like everything in NCT the opportunity to think about something and talk it through – is so illuminating…

Rose saw this as something she recognised too, having done "so much…reflective practice". However, Raven was not enjoying or engaging in mentoring, so this same recognition was irritating. She felt that:

…because – you know we can all spot reflecting language a mile off – and I think for some people it causes them to switch off actually because then it starts to feel impersonal.

There were other skills too. Marigold commented on her mentor's use of silence on the telephone, saying this was "such an NCT thing" as tutors used similar techniques. Garnet also noted she had known why her mentor was being silent in calls and what was expected of their interaction. This amused Garnet, who had a positive relationship with her mentor.

Another expected skill was empathy although there was no specific question in interviews around this. I did not want to lead participants, but rather see what arose. Hazel, Pearl and Silver all appreciated their mentor's empathy and Sable commented her mentor was "…extremely empathetic – that's a sort of overarching one". She viewed empathy as the "ice-breaker" enabling initial obstacles to be overcome. Few mentors mentioned it, although almost all of them used language showing empathy towards their mentees. Coral particularly highlighted being mindful of practitioners' circumstances, including their isolation, being aware of their anxieties around facilitating courses, and the need to be conscious of other aspects of their complex lives. Crystal commented on the importance of revealing something about herself as:

…you know that vulnerability that if you can exhibit that to people then maybe you get that bit of – empathy going between the two of you…

Sable agreed, suggesting that if mentors did not "let out" a bit of their personality then "empathy isn't then trusted". So the shared skills of empathy, reflective practice, active listening, and active learning perhaps enabled some mentors and mentees to bypass some of the conventions of getting to know one another. This body of skills and values shared and expected within the organisation might help to enable trust to begin to develop, in addition to what I saw as the third aspect to 'NCT-ness': organisational trust.

Organisational trust

Although experiences were not uniform, it seemed trust came easily between most mentoring dyads, appearing to be connected to two elements. Firstly, personal levels of trust, which are discussed in section 4.3b. This type of trust appeared to link to organisational trust, as working for the same organisation encouraged a sense of knowing a colleague can be trusted. This may be particularly so when the organisation itself appears trustworthy; Poppy noted practitioners in general, and mentors in particular, were:

> …part of quite a good – a greater good – an organisation that really wants to do something worthwhile – and it's trustworthy.

Blanche clearly felt this too:

> I think – a bit like meeting you today…that level of trust and respect I think…you don't have to sort of work at that – because you have to have got over enough hurdles – or opportunities to leave – to get to the point you're at that the people left are generally – very trusting and trustworthy and…professional and you respect them.

Interviews were conducted in several participants' homes and although protocol around leaving details with a contact was followed, at no time was there concern about going into unknown environments. Similarly, Ruby commented:

> …with you coming as well – because I probably wouldn't be very comfortable going to someone's home that I didn't know – but

because you're NCT and I'm NCT that's all fine [laughs] – it's just kind of one of those things that <u>is</u> and I don't know why.

This was not the case for everyone. When I asked Silver if she had felt safe speaking openly because of my other roles within NCT, she admitted that "just the mere fact that you're NCT at all" had made her "slightly cautious." This feeling of wariness was possibly prompted by Silver's experiences leading to mentoring being instigated; these resulted in strong feelings against NCT. Interestingly, the fact mentoring came from NCT did not lead her to mistrust the mentor. Silver felt she could trust that the mentor had the extra training to enable her to achieve the mentor role.

NCT training, both in general and specifically for mentoring, largely met with approval and trust. Perhaps Pearl sums this up:

> …the reassurance – in knowing that somebody has not only trained as a practitioner – as an EP…they've gone through – NCT training which I think is very rigorous…in things like…EP roles – so I trust the system – to a point.

Several mentees had taken it for granted that training, along with having the right motive and experience as a practitioner, would enable people to be mentors. Scarlet commented:

> I guess I just think if somebody's – doing that kind of role…that they obviously feel they've got experience in themselves they feel they've got the confidence…to do it…plus they will have had some sort of training to do it and been given that role…

Pink agreed there was intrinsic trust as this was an NCT mentor:

> Yeah definitely…because she was part of the NCT and because that was her role – and maybe this comes down to the fact that she was paid to do it as well…yes I definitely did trust her because that was her job and that was her role and that was what she was there to do…

How much trust came from the organisational factors and how much from elsewhere is unclear, and this will be considered further in section 4.3b. The culture of trusting perhaps originated during early training which was face-to-face for the most part. One potential barrier to trust arose from NCT being a dispersed organisation.

4.1c Implications of a dispersed organisation

NCT is a third-sector organisation, which faces issues of communications and logistics due to it being a dispersed organisation with no single workplace. These circumstances often created a sense of isolation for NCTPs, which emerged strongly in interviews. Ruby noted that she would very often go six months without bumping into another practitioner. Lavender, Marigold and Coral all used the image of a single flower (no.33) to highlight those feelings, while Pink and Rose saw isolation in image 32 (a single figure in the snow). Garnet commented:

> …I feel like we work in isolation quite a lot of the time…it would be really nice to be able to…remind yourself of where you're going and why you're there…

It was recognised in the documentation that the purposes of mentoring included attempts at reducing these feelings (D120522; D140800).

As explained in Appendix 1, the decision to work virtually was both pragmatic and to provide safe spaces; the latter being highlighted in information for mentees as enhancing confidentiality through being 'outside of your working area' (D160511:1). This was sometimes recognised as useful; as Cherry said:

> …it's also probably good that she's not local…because then you…don't upset anybody locally…quite good as well that it's just somebody totally different.

The difficult situation had made Scarlet feel "inadequate", so it was "easier" to work with a stranger. The Collated Evaluations (D170314:8) also recorded mentees who were relieved at the distance involved. One expressed she 'was more able to honestly voice my thoughts knowing I wasn't going to bump into her the next week'. Another appreciated that:

> …having a mentor who was completely independent from my studies and my area enabled me to be honest and open in my discussions with her.

Some participants in the study saw real advantages to the distances involved, with Crystal, Poppy and Sable appreciating the sense of anonymity this brought, and Silver considering it easier to leave a virtual conversation if necessary. Other participants had more practical reasons to see distance as beneficial. Amber and Pearl appreciated staying at home

and not having to travel to meet mentoring partners, with Amber noting the resulting benefit to demands on her time. Not having to find childcare to have a mentoring conversation pleased Pearl, who was quite happy to work virtually. Poppy was slightly blunter: travelling would have been "a real pain – an added pain." Rose had somewhat conflicting feelings, partly influenced by time:

> I would prefer to do that sort of conversation face-to-face…I would have been a bit reluctant to travel and see somebody and then turn it into the whole half day exercise – and I found it perfectly adequate having a phone conversation so it hasn't impacted at all on how useful it is.

The Mentoring Evaluation Report (D150817:8) noted a number of mentees commenting that a face-to-face element would have been useful. However, those preferring face-to-face contact nevertheless mostly accepted using technology as the only realistic option in offering support to dispersed practitioners. A few mentees seemed to go to some effort to find out about their mentor, with one looking up articles by her mentor in internal publications. Marigold noted:

> …you get an email saying who your mentor is – when you start linking them with – their posts on Facebook and all these other kind of ways of getting to know them…

Others were happy with knowing what their mentor looked like; some arranged to meet at the national conference or at study days. Lavender suggested exchanging photos would help, as one mentee she met said how nice it was "to be able to put a face to the name".

So for some participants the distance proved valuable, as did a focus on practice rather than studying. This was not so for all mentees. Olive had very strong feelings around mentors being local to enable some face-to-face contact, or at least known to mentees prior to mentoring. Three mentees' evaluation forms (D170314:11) mentioned a local mentor would have improved their experience. One felt that:

> …being allocated a mentor who I had never met, at a time of great change and vulnerability inhibited my ability to be open.

The distances between mentees and mentors, and the fact of there not being enough time available for travel, mostly precluded face-to-face meetings, meaning that technology had to be used for mentoring dyads to

make contact. Thus the concept of distance and media used within a mentoring relationship are inextricably linked together, and to the time element (further considered in section 4.2b).

4.2 The features of the mentoring scheme

Having considered the context of the culture of NCT, it is important to examine the features of the scheme as they clearly affected mentoring experiences for mentees and mentors. These features – the limited hours, the formal nature of the scheme, including compulsory mentoring for some mentees and the matching of dyads, mentors being paid, and that mentoring is virtual – are the focus for this section. The payment aspect is considered first, as this is key in dictating limited time-frames. Pay is one of the potential rewards from mentoring, so it will be considered within that context.

4.2a Rewards for mentors

As all NCT practitioners are self-employed and remunerated separately for each role undertaken, it was considered normal by interviewees for mentors to be paid. There was also recognition that normal practice for all NCTPs involved working for more hours than were remunerated. This recognition feeds into the concept of 'NCT-ness', and around the aspect of time, which will be considered below. Even so, the hours available for mentees were restricted by limits on funding because NCT's scheme was formal, together with the commitment to pay mentors for their roles in supporting practitioners. Some mentees were "glad" to hear mentors were paid for several reasons, including the idea that payment demonstrated that mentors, and their time, were being valued by the organisation. As Clementine said, "if they've trained to do it – why shouldn't you get paid? Like everything else." Poppy would have been surprised if her mentor had not been paid and Silver was reassured by the payments: "if I then choose to rabbit on – she's being paid to listen to me so – that's ok". Mentees considered NCT was valuing practitioners by supporting them with mentors, although Blanche and Jade both thought it might encourage mentees to see mentors in a negative way, perhaps by being seen as part of management processes.

Several participants, both mentors and mentees, thought payment added an element of professionalism to the relationship. As Sage said, "if it's a paid job you're a little bit more – more – committed?" and Pink expressed in the world of business "if I didn't pay for it it's not worth it". Ruby wondered whether she "took it more seriously when I knew she was being paid". These mentees felt payment improved mentoring, with Pink feeling it was:

> …more formal and more useful almost because it was – more validated I guess…maybe I took it more seriously when I knew she was being paid…it felt more structured.

Sage and Silver agreed that being paid encouraged mentors to keep up-to-date and know their "stuff", potentially increasing opportunities for mentee development. There was a strong feeling that paid mentors protected time to speak to mentees, unlike volunteer mentors who would fit them in around other work. Pearl valued someone being paid to support her:

> …if you think someone's a volunteer you – it's not the same as – because you feel like you're encroaching on their time you know – they're doing it as a favour…

This enabled mentees not to worry about being a burden, except for Rose, who was very aware of time-limits imposed on mentoring relationships, despite acknowledging her mentor's reassurance on this. A few mentees had not realised their mentor was paid, like Marigold, who was not sure she had "actually even thought about it" and Pink who found out "sort of half-way through". Even so, most mentees saw payment as a positive, or as an expected, part of mentoring. Cherry viewed paid mentoring as representing a career possibility, an option "further along the line to earn more money by doing different things."

Mentors unsurprisingly saw payment for their time mostly as a benefit. For Amber and Lavender it was part of their contribution to family income. Sienna explained that she, like others, had been mentoring local practitioners informally before the scheme, and she appreciated getting paid for formal mentoring. However, payment also added responsibility for mentors. As Crystal said:

> …I mean being paid means that – there feels a responsibility – and – that's a double-edged sword because…it means you really have to be on your game every time you speak with someone…I need to do this properly and effectively…

This responsibility was taken seriously by mentors. It was acknowledged in the 2013-14 Mentoring Annual Report (D140814:2) that mentoring:

> …demands a huge investment of time for little financial reward…particularly taking into account the time we need to invest in order to stay up to date and [be] supported ourselves.

Jade really appreciated the "genuine thank you" comments from mentees which shows not all rewards were financial ones. There was a potentially negative aspect to paying mentors, as Lavender pointed out:

> …I suspect they felt that I'd been chasing them up – and I was chasing them up because I wanted to be paid…

Even though this was only her interpretation of her mentee's feelings, it could be borne out by Amber noting "I want to get paid so therefore I generally make sure it happens". However, I would not interpret this as meaning that Amber would, or could, enforce a session of mentoring not actually needed. This was also not the experience of participating mentees, none of whom felt negatively about mentors being paid, although Olive did suggest the contrast with her tutor was such that she felt her care and concern, while the mentor was "just a paid mentee [*sic*] job". Even so, she still recognised the value of having a paid rather than a volunteer mentor who would have to fit her around other work. Being paid possibly helped to engender a sense of trust between mentee and mentor, as Pink said:

> …maybe this comes down to the fact that she was paid to do it as well…yes I did definitely trust her because that was her job and that was her role and that was what she was there to do.

As a result, payment seems to have mostly enhanced the experience for mentees. It ensured mentors kept up-to-date thus offering more opportunities for development. It also offered professional aspects to the mentoring relationship, and valued mentees and mentors. It particularly protected time available for mentoring, up to certain limits.

4.2b Time: limited hours and timeliness

Time, as it affected NCT mentoring, had two aspects: firstly, the effects of limited hours being funded for mentoring, and secondly, that some mentoring relationships seemed to be at more advantageous times in mentees' work-lives. The effects of both these were mixed. No organisation

has unlimited money, but limited charity funds restrict mentoring to two hours for certain mentees and three for others, over varying time-scales. Documentation contained comments from mentees and mentors around extra time being wanted, although some perceived the time as adequate, so the picture was unclear. Mentors generally felt (D150817:10) that '2 (or 3) hours was often not enough to effect change', which could be frustrating, and interview data echoes this. Crystal felt that "only having two hours is just nowhere near enough". Sienna agreed, considering relationships with more hours were "stronger and – sufficient". Several mentees also felt more hours would be useful; had Ruby been strictly limited to two hours she was unsure how "a sufficiently strong relationship" to enable "useful discussions" would have been built, implying she had extra time with her mentor. However, most mentees accepted the allocated time. Some mentees used strategies to make the best of the limited time; one mentee (D170314:9) noted that she had:

> …held off using the mentor for the first few months as I was very conscious that I only had a limited time with her, and I wanted to ensure that I would have time left if the need arose.

Cherry too spoke about having "saved up" time. Thus, the effect of time-limits could restrict the building of rapport, leaving mentors feeling they were failing to engage mentees. Some participants commented that the time-limit curtailed friendship or a "meaningful relationship" arising out of mentoring, although this maintained professional relationships, as Scarlet, Cherry, Sable and Silver preferred.

If time-limits for probationary mentees were respected, gaps in between calls to ensure time remained available were inevitable. This sometimes meant things felt "fragmented" (Crystal), so catching up was needed with each call. One strategy used was incorporating emails into telephone-based relationships. Sienna mentioned one mentee sending short emails to keep in touch, meaning less time was expended on social catch-up when speaking. Coral felt that being able to contact people more often would have made a difference, although not with all of her mentees. Blanche also felt it was not "as simple as just more time – throwing more time at it would [not] work". In fact, for Marigold it would have been unhelpful to have longer, it would have made mentoring:

...less likely to happen ...if it had been an hour longer then I would have been...where am I going to find that time...much as it would have been lovely...

For mentees in post-difficult situations, time-limits were less of an issue. They were usually funded for three rather than two hours, over an average of eight rather than thirteen months, as for probationers (D170314). This was considered beneficial by Sienna, as there was less fragmentation. Mentoring here tended to be task-focused, as Hazel commented, "it wasn't an ongoing problem – the problem had occurred – that was it". Once she had been supported through her feelings of distress and hurt, and an action plan worked through, the mentoring relationship ended. For Hazel, the spreading out of calls was useful, as she could reflect and develop in between them. This was echoed by another mentee (D170314:4) feeling she could 'gradually review the changes' being made. With volunteer mentees the time was usually more than sufficient, and gaps in between calls enabled Garnet to "reflect and think and move on". Sage decided she had to use her time "wisely" and not ask "bitty questions", involving her in preparation for mentoring.

The limit was often ameliorated by mentors working extra time "for love" (Amber), noted in both the interviews and evaluation forms. One mentee commented 'she gave me as much time and support as I wanted, beyond the specified hours' (D170314:5). Lavender explained:

> ...I take those hours as a guideline – because let's face it we all do – in all of our roles do much more work than we're actually...paid for...

This showed a commitment to mentees, and to the aims of NCT, common in many roles; as Ruby noted "I think that's quite NCT though isn't it". Mentors often discounted social time in calls as not being working time and therefore not forming part of the total. This was the case even though social time helped to build up rapport. Several mentees felt as Ruby did, that she "benefited because [mentor-name] didn't count our introductory...exchange of emails or conversation". So when mentees commented on time feeling "like it was more than" the limit as Cherry and Clementine did, it is possible they did have more time. It was impossible to ascertain exactly how many hours dyads used, as participants spoke from their perspectives.

Time-limits were beneficial in focusing sessions, which supported development, as Jade noted. Lavender found it "helps concentrate the

mind…we actually need to progress something". Some mentees also felt this; for example, Blanche, Scarlet and Silver found time-limits helped make the most of the time, while Marigold commented that conversations were "never waffly they were always to the point". Sometimes social conversation could be an issue; as Sienna pointed out, if the only time probationers could talk was when small children were asleep, conversation used up precious mentoring time. These elements conflicted with the need to build relationships through social interaction and finding connections with one another. Lavender observed mentees were often happy to "cut to the chase" as they were "time-bound…within their whole lives". The image of clocks (no.49) reinforced this for Lavender as she empathised with the demands on probationers. Other participants also selected this image, reinforcing the importance of time issues. Pearl chose it to reflect the difficulty of, and the necessity of, committing time to something in a busy life, whilst recognising the value of mentoring. For Poppy, it represented mentoring being time-bound, which was useful for her in containing the demands mentoring made. The image enabled Rose to realise time was more of an issue for her than she thought. She began the relationship by considering two hours not enough to seem useful, but acknowledged "it probably has been enough time", although it clearly still troubled her in the interview.

For several participants mentoring needed to be of longer duration. Several mentees commented on needing a 'continuing relationship' (D150817:12) into the following year. One stated 'it would perhaps be even more valuable if there could be an ongoing relationship', which suggested a longer duration than only the subsequent year (D170314:9). These evaluations were supported by interviews, where Cherry and Pink also would have liked longer mentoring relationships. For some participants, mentoring needed to be at, or include, a different phase of their working life. Marigold found it "astonishing that we finished the [specialism training] and don't have any – mentoring". Scarlet would have liked more time after her next facilitated course to discuss changes she had made. The 2014-15 Mentor Report (D150713) recognised a 'general feeling that the [probationers] were 'dropped' entirely at the end of their probationary year.' During that year, they were supported by tutors and peers, so for some, mentoring was almost superfluous, as with Poppy and Olive. Although Pink appreciated

the work with her mentor, if mentoring could not be longer-term, she would have preferred it in her first year post-probation as she had felt unsupported then, and Poppy agreed. Several mentees in documents said similar things, with one mentee expressing that she felt 'quite lonely to be honest' as a 'fully fledged practitioner' (D170314:10), showing how NCT's culture of support can be experienced differently.

For volunteer mentees, working with a mentor-in-training was usually at an appropriate time; if not they were unlikely to volunteer. However, the time-period that one mentor-in-training needed to use fell between two of Sage's courses. Sage reflected that mentoring would have been more useful alongside a course, with discussions being more immediately applicable. Garnet reflected that the opportunity to volunteer for mentoring had been serendipitous, arising at the right time for her. Mentoring following on from post-difficult situations should be suitably timed for mentees, but this was open to error as Coral reflected:

> …sometimes they've done quite a lot of reflection by the time we get to them…sometimes you may be talking to people only a week or so after they [had difficulties] – sometimes it might be actually a number of months…

This presented different challenges to mentors, with long time-lapses offering the potential for mentees to have been unsupported while brooding on their situation. Mentees coming straight from difficult circumstances could be full of emotional upheaval. Two mentors commented (D150713:2) on mentees needing 'support while recovering from the shock, anger or grief' produced by those circumstances. Jade had experienced this:

> …you have to listen to all of the – "I'm really angry about this" or "this is really unfair" or "this is really wrong"…cos if you don't <u>hear</u> that – and validate it then they're not going to move on… sometimes you know it's just listen.

It is clear that aspects around time have had varied effects on mentees and mentors. Limitations of time in terms of hours and timeliness were imposed by the formal nature of NCT's scheme, and this is considered next.

The fact that the scheme was formal, i.e. organised by NCT College, with the scheme coordinator being responsible for processes, seems in itself to have had little influence over whether mentoring supported participants' professional development. Clementine used an image (no.31) of two relaxed women to express the informality of the relationship being helpful, suggesting the formal arrangement of mentoring was irrelevant to her. While some effects of having a formal scheme have been recognised in discussions on the limited hours and timeliness of mentoring, other features such as the compulsory nature of some mentoring relationships, and the matching process, are deliberated here. For some mentees, the key aspect of formality was that mentoring was a planned and therefore compulsory part of their programme.

Compulsory mentoring and matching of dyads

Mentoring was compulsory in probationary and newly-qualified years for NCTPs, and therefore linked to the formality of the scheme. Several mentors felt this made mentoring more difficult as probationers often saw it as "just another thing to do". Lavender noted "they're doing it because they have to". Two mentees commented that it needed to be clearer that mentoring was compulsory (D170314:11), although documents introducing the scheme (D160511; D160702) stated taking part in mentoring was a requirement of the course. Some probationers saw it as a box-ticking exercise; as Olive said: "You know the contact is only there to fulfil the mentoring capacity". For some probationers this view was only present at the beginning and later changed. Rose had wondered "if it was…another NCT hoop I need to jump through". Marigold said:

> …you know prior to starting…because it was the probationary year and all the different things you have to do – it felt like just another thing that you were ticking off the list to make sure you'd done.

Her attitude changed after the second mentoring call, which was "amazing" in how her mentor's empathy and skills promoted reflective dialogue. Other probationary mentees (D150817:7) similarly said mentoring initially felt like another box to be ticked, but in the end had been 'essential'. With interview participants, only Raven found it to have no lasting benefits at all; she had

found one thing useful at the time but during the interview she could not remember what it was, suggesting it had not been developmental.

Documentation (D160727:1) shows that NCTPs in post-difficult situations have to agree to mentoring beforehand, so it was not compulsory. Mentoring for Silver was recommended as support for development after her difficult situation, but she perceived it as compulsory:

> …if you start refusing the help you're given then where do you go from there…it was the feeling that you take what people are giving you…

Silver's general attitude towards NCT at the time might suggest her overall experiences had contributed to this perception. Even so, Silver did not view mentoring as a box-ticking exercise, but rather as of use to her. Other mentees in post-difficult situations did not appear to feel their mentoring was compulsory. Hazel said:

> Well I remember having to be persuaded to do it…she [manager] said well why don't you try it…and I thought do you know what I have absolutely nothing to lose by trying it.

Scarlet saw the offer of mentoring as positive, and Clementine was grateful that it was there, while Sable was "relishing the support". So the formality of the mentoring scheme, as represented by its compulsory (or not) nature did not appear to directly influence whether mentees found the experience a developmental one or not.

Another element of formality was matching mentees and mentors; they expressed contact and communication preferences, but the matching was organised in my role as mentor-coordinator, mostly by specialism (section 4.3a). For most people this was not problematic, whether in training relationships, as probationers or NQPs, or in post-difficult situations. In contrast Raven saw this as a major issue:

> …in some ways I found it quite hard that it was just sort of a – complete random stranger – who didn't appear to actually understand or have any knowledge of what I was doing…

Among the issues affecting Raven's experience, this seems to have been a major influence on her not finding mentoring to be developmental. The lack of connection is considered further in section 4.3a.

Mentors had to achieve EP status before applying for mentoring training, so they were seen as 'good citizens' in NCT terms. This often manifested in informal mentoring in their local area, with this scheme as a natural progression. Jade felt it "seemed the logical next thing to do", and Sienna considered she might as well get paid for doing what she was already doing. Most informal relationships in their local areas carried on, evidencing NCT's culture of support. This meant mentors' work load increased with the addition of long-distance formal mentees who needed some form of virtual mentoring.

4.2d Virtual mentoring

Face-to-face mentoring was rarely possible with NCT being a dispersed organisation. The distances between practitioners, together with the lack of time or funds to enable travelling, meant virtual methods had to be used to enable formal mentoring. These virtual methods included synchronous and asynchronous media: telephone, email and videoconferencing (Skype or FaceTime). Although email was a large part of some mentoring relationships, for most participants telephone was the most used medium (D170314:1), with advantages and disadvantages found for both methods.

Telephone calls appeared flexible and suitable to mentees, although the lack of visual cues of body language could make it difficult for mentees and mentors. Mentors' proficiency at listening and interpreting voice tones and silences improved with practice, but as Jade reflected, mentees had less time to hone such skills. Emerald noted that she needed to be "present" when on the telephone, while Lavender found it gave her space to collect her thoughts. Working this way improved telephone skills for both Silver and Marigold. Silver and Hazel commented they could not judge whether their mentor was younger than them whilst using a telephone. In theory this should not have mattered, but in practice they both seemed to feel if she had been, it would have made their mentoring relationship more difficult. The anonymity of using a telephone also helped to keep relationships professional, as Sable noted. However, the telephone enabled distractions; Jade had found mentees were caring for children during calls, and Crystal was frustrated by mentees being "on her mobile and doing the washing up at the same time". Hazel, Poppy and Raven were honest in interviews; all

admitting to multi-tasking during mentoring conversations. Raven said "cos it's long distance you can…get away with it – watch TV with the subtitles on [laughs] – all these kind of things" which could relate to the lack of value she found with mentoring. The potential for distraction was not only with mentees, Sienna found it necessary to move from the computer to the sofa to avoid being distracted during mentoring calls. This also made her feel more friendly and relaxed.

The complex lives led by some mentees, with young families and other work alongside NCT work and study, limited their free time. Arranging telephone calls under these circumstances often proved difficult, so working via email suited them and avoided distractions, which mentors saw as a benefit. Email could be a more reflective medium than the telephone for mentees as it enabled time to think as they were writing (Emerald) or provided them with opportunities to check the sense before sending (Jade). Jade also appreciated being able to reflect before responding. Some participants used email only as a quick catch up between calls, like Blanche's note about a strategy discussed with her mentor "ooh did it and it worked". Sienna commented when one of her mentees emailed her she had:

> …just dropped in – a little bit of…herself…and it takes…her two minutes me two minutes…that means when we pick up the phone – we're still…in contact…

This clearly enabled a more efficient use of available time. However, having to wait for asynchronous responses could be frustrating, particularly for mentors. Some mentors disliked the lack of voice tones and body language with email and preferred not to be matched with mentees who wished to work that way. One interviewed mentee had dyslexia, which made emailing difficult.

Although many people liked the idea of working face-to-face, using videoconferencing was not universally liked. Poppy "didn't particularly get on well with Skype", and Marigold would have "turned down" any request for Skype from her mentor. Perhaps Crystal's stance might begin to explain this; she preferred not to dress up in a "professional" manner to speak with mentees, and was therefore happy using telephone or email. My own experience may also help to explain the dislike of Skype; it was difficult to hear in the pilot interview due to interference, which would disrupt a

mentoring session. Skype may not have been popular with some mentees as it would have revealed their multi-tasking, or distraction.

Some participants did like Skype: Coral felt it bridged the gap between telephone and a face-to-face meeting, and helped her to increase rapport with mentees. Ruby liked being able to see her mentor's surroundings as it gave her a picture of the whole person, and she could see her mentor was focused on listening. One mentee reported (D170314:11) that meeting face-to-face would have improved mentoring, but 'that wasn't such a big issue as the conversations we had over Skype were very valuable'. So, for the most part, virtual mentoring methods proved acceptable to scheme participants, although individuals preferred different methods for various reasons. Most people preferred using the telephone, with some email and some Skype use. Virtual mentoring was valued for its flexibility and the anonymity it provided by most participants, who found it fitted with other priorities.

Having considered the features of the mentoring scheme, the next section focuses upon the creation and nature of the relationships between mentees and mentors within the context of the organisation.

4.3 Relationships within the scheme

From participant responses, relationships in this study were based on shared connections, and feelings of trust and respect. Relationships varied in intensity, from potential friends to mentees that mentors barely knew as they had not engaged with mentoring. Mentees varied in expectations and outlooks on mentoring relationships. Some were happy with professional working relationships meeting their needs without becoming a friendship; Silver summed it up as "companionable". Others needed something more personal, as Clementine noted "you've got to feel happy talking to that person" and Marigold spoke of the "chemistry" of working together, while Ruby considered it important to get to know her mentor well. Relationships were set within the formal and sometimes compulsory context, with matching carried out with some input from mentees and mentors.

Mentoring being virtual was influential, as was time in both aspects, and 'NCT-ness'. Relationships also seemed to be related to the support from mentors presented in section 4.1a, and appeared dependent on two aspects of formation. Firstly, the building or discovery of connections between mentor and mentee, which is explored below. One major aspect is considered separately, of matching decisions largely on the basis of shared specialism, leading to a shared understanding of the work carried out by mentees. Secondly the trust and other positive feelings generated between mentees and mentors is presented. This section leads on to the final one in Chapter Four, where the developmental nature of the mentoring scheme is considered.

4.3a Shared connections

Many different aspects within the data enabled mentees and mentors to find common ground to begin building rapport. This could have been as basic as Sable saying there had to be "some connection" between mentor and mentee, or Hazel's plea to:

> …strike up a rapport with me – find out about – you don't need to know the names of the children but...have we got something in common – that we can refer – back to…and I don't care whether that's…you've got a dog or kids or…something…

Garnet appreciated her mentor being a parent and so understood (and shared) the difficulties of finding time to speak without being interrupted:

> I know it's a funny thing but I suppose one of the first things was just that kind of connection you have as parents – so trying to organise a time that we could speak to each other was really…difficult.

NCTPs are all women, which was important to several participants, including Garnet, who commented on an image (no.40) of two women smiling and talking, that:

> …there's something about these – friendship – and warmth – and that nurturing thing that women do really well.

Hazel also found this connection important, commenting on the "huge support" shown in the same image (no.40). Sable took the female connection one step further and wondered if there was some maternal aspect to her mentor's role:

> I keep coming back to the maternal thing and that may be an NCT sort of…yeh I really recognise it as almost an NCT – trait…

Other basic attributes were mentioned, including age; it was occasionally important that the mentor was the same age if not older. Hazel liked a number of images of women talking: "if you look they're the same age and this [no.23] is obviously an older one here", and Silver also preferred someone of her own age.

However, the connection was sometimes more complex: as Emerald and Jade pointed out, mentors have walked the same paths as mentees are travelling now, they have faced the same practicalities with setting up courses, and struggled with similar issues around working with parents. The pathway analogy was a common one from images used in the study, with several eliciting thoughts of a journey or travelling the same route. For Olive it was an image of footprints over a sand dune (no.41), where she and her mentor had walked the same path. A picture of a lone figure in the snow (no.32) moved Marigold to comment that walking in another's footsteps would ease the journey. One mentee felt that 'having a mentor made this journey easier' (D150817:12). Lavender also drew attention to this:

> …so we do a little bit of mutual sharing just to say – "yes we're on the same page here" – "yes that's hard isn't it" – "yes I remember that experience back when I started facilitating" – so just to try and share a bit of commonality.

NCT training also provided skills that could be expected to be shared throughout the body of practitioners, which were discussed in section 4.1b on 'NCT-ness', and enabled a sense of connection and expectations of abilities and behaviours.

It was evident from participants that establishing commonalities enabled the building of relationships between mentors and mentees so they could turn their attention to work. Hazel summed it up:

> I think it's very important…they must get that common ground to gain confidence…nobody's going to tell you how they really feel – unless they feel confident.

Most mentors began mentoring relationships by emailing information about themselves, and seeking information about mentees, before any calls. This was suggested during mentoring training to begin to enable connections.

Not all of them did so sufficiently however, as Crystal reflected during our interview. She began to wonder if she did not pay enough attention to relationship building, and whether that had contributed to some previous difficult mentoring relationships. She decided to try different strategies going forward. However, efforts to build rapport through commonalities were not always successful. Initially, Poppy felt her mentor:

> …was very keen to know all about my personal – circumstances and family and…she told me a lot about herself and I did think "I don't really need to know this"…

During the interview Poppy changed her stance on this, commenting the mentor enabled her to feel confident to speak:

> …yes I think giving a part of herself is part of building rapport isn't it…if she were to sort of actively withhold then you might feel a little bit distrustful of her so…that's just – a bit – harsh of me.

Similar approaches to mentees resulted in different outcomes, with mentors noting some of their mentees had engaged well while others had not done so; clearly there was no universal approach to ensure rapport building.

Initial differences between Sable and her mentor appeared insurmountable. They facilitated in different areas, with distinct clientele and had apparently incompatible interests. Like most mentors, Sable's sent information about herself by email before their first call; here though, Sable found that this created a barrier rather than rapport:

> …there were two or three things I was particularly daunted by – that we were entirely different as people…I couldn't write a more different sort of [person].

However, these perceived differences became unimportant once they began working together. Sable thought the mentor's empathy, intelligence, and efficiency had overcome the barrier:

> …sort of overriding of what our differences were in terms of…whatever – or distance…that became irrelevant and her support and her empathy just – bashed away those obstacles...

Sable wondered whether a "blank page" would have been more useful than her mentor's introduction, but later acknowledged her mentor's willingness to be open about herself enabled Sable to trust and make use of the relationship. It seems the warmth and empathy of the mentor had overcome initial differences within the dyad. They did share a specialism,

which enabled the mentor to work effectively on the issues that Sable brought to mentoring.

In summary, although there was no universal approach that ensured an engaged mentee, most mentors did at least attempt to build rapport by exchanging information with mentees in order to establish commonalities, demonstrate their understanding of NCTPs' work, and to enable an ongoing relationship. One of the most important commonalities was sharing a specialism within a dyad.

Shared specialisms

Mentors in NCT are drawn from all major specialisms (antenatal teachers, breastfeeding counsellors and postnatal practitioners), and also include some supporting specialisms and services too (e.g. yoga for pregnancy teachers, and doulas). Most participants indicated that a relevant specialism was important when matching, although in the early days of the mentoring scheme few mentors could facilitate the new Essentials courses, which was an issue for some probationer mentees but not for others. Two mentees (D170314) felt it had a negative effect, with one noting it would 'have been good' if the mentor had been the same kind of practitioner. Another suggested that knowing the specific challenges of Essentials courses would have been useful in a mentor. Crystal reported feeling her credibility as a mentor suffered:

> …if a mentee has said to me do you teach Essentials and I've said no and it's gone quiet…I wonder if they feel – does she really know what she's going on about…

For Cherry, rather than questioning her mentor's credibility, the focus was on how a same-specialism mentor would have been more helpful to her:

> I still think – on balance – it might have been more helpful if it was somebody who taught Essentials…not meaning anything about her but – then you can say "when I do this" "when you do this" "how do you do this bit"…and be very very specific.

Cherry had still found mentoring to be very useful, but the lack of shared specialist knowledge clearly had been important. However, not sharing the same specialism meant a different outcome for Raven, as mentioned in

section 4.3a. She perceived her mentor "didn't appear to actually understand or have any knowledge" of the specialism.

One of Amber's mentees had asked to be moved to another mentor due to the lack of shared knowledge. As a result, Amber had increased her knowledge by reading and by observing practitioners. The more up to date knowledge of some of the changing services and specialisms that mentees held was thus useful in encouraging the development of some mentors. For Pink the fact that her mentor had taught Essentials was of great practical use:

> …I could say "I'm really struggling with session two" and "how do you fit this together"…the fact that she's been in that position and could actually provide some practical advice as well I think was really useful…

Pink reflected that sharing practical knowledge and experience helped the mentor to ask her "the right questions". The only reason Sage had volunteered to be mentored by a mentor-in-training was so they could speak about "the specifics" of her course, and therefore a shared knowledge was essential for meeting her needs. As Marigold noted, "sometimes you need someone who actually knows what you're talking about." Blanche felt it important her mentor shared her specialism. She commented:

> …because she knew a lot of the things that I…could just say one word and sigh – and she'd go "yeh I know what you mean" – so not having to overly explain myself…was crucial…

Blanche believed this shared understanding provided an easier "fit" into the roles of mentor and mentee, enabling working together more efficiently, and more quickly, than with a mentor from another specialism. Similarly, a mentor from a different specialism would not have been as much use to Pearl:

> …because they are quite different ways of working…and just you know – the shared empathy and…it just felt a bit…different kettle of fish somehow.

Scarlet's initial contact after her difficult situation was with someone from another specialism; her thoughts were "how are you going to be able to help me?" This contact was ultimately useful, perhaps contradicting Pearl and reinforcing the importance of shared skills between NCTPs.

The "specifics" (Sage) may seem beyond what mentors should be providing for mentees, as it could be seen as only instruction rather than mentoring; however, this reinforces the key element of how a scheme is defined and understood within the organisation. Some mentors felt this was not necessarily appropriate to deal with but they were pragmatic. Sienna commented:

> …I really don't see that as my role – but I'm – talking to somebody who feels that that's the thing that she most needs – out of me at that time and it's not helpful for me to go – "no well you don't need to be asking me you need to be finding out who you need to ask that of – and go off and do it by yourself."

It was common for mentors to believe that dealing with the practical support mentees needed would build up confidence and trust which would then enable deeper, more reflective aspects to be aired. Coral said:

> …I've sometimes found it actually a really good way to move forward with a mentee is to – "let's focus down on something nitty-gritty" – because if they can actually see that they're getting some tangible benefit from it then sometimes they're more prepared – to think about the wider [issues]

Shared specialisms were not crucial for everyone though. One email exchange (D161212) I had as mentor-coordinator with a mentee refers to her mentor as:

> …more of a sounding board as she does not know details of my course and studying as it is not her role to know.

It was also not mentioned on mentees' evaluation forms during the first two years of the mentoring scheme (D150817). Ruby commented that it mattered that her tutor had no practical experience of Ruby's new specialism, but it did not with her mentor. The reasons for this were not identified during the interview, but it might have been because she was planning her course under her tutor's supervision. However, Rose and Silver also worked with Ruby's mentor and did not share a specialism with her, which is a departure from usual practice. None of the three mentioned her lack of specialist knowledge as a disadvantage. This could perhaps indicate the skill, or the empathy, of the mentor as sufficient to overcome the lack of shared specialist knowledge, as Ruby's mentor is experienced, skilled and empathic. The relationships between this mentor and the three mentees appear to be key here.

Nevertheless, for the most part, mentees in this study wanted mentors who shared the same body of specialist knowledge to enable practical conversations and shared understandings of issues arising from their work. Other connections encompassed the shared values and skills of 'NCT-ness', (including aspects of organisational trust), helping to generate trust between mentees and mentors.

4.3b Trust and respect

For all interviewed mentees except Olive, a sense of respect and trust existed between them and their mentors, even if these terms were not initially what came to mind (Cherry). Olive thought it wasn't "that kind of relationship", as she perceived mentoring solely as box-ticking despite finding her mentor to be very helpful in one situation in her practice. Many mentees mentioned intrinsic trust and respect for fellow NCTPs, or for someone who had trained and earned the role of mentor, as discussed in section 4.1b on 'NCT-ness'. Several responses linked trust and respect, as with Silver, who stated "I think we each respected the other and I think obviously had to be trust". Most mentors perceived it as disrespectful when mentees did not reply, although Emerald differed:

> …if they're choosing not to respond – their decision isn't it really – you know I will remind them but…I'm not going to worry about feeling disrespected…for me it's not an issue I can imagine for other people it would be.

Evaluation forms had not asked about trust or respect, but one mentee mentioned trust in her feedback (D170314:9), feeling:

> It can take time to form a trust relationship and without that I was unable to really talk about the things that mattered the most. I find this particularly difficult over the phone/ by email when I cannot read the other person's body language.

This mentee went on to say she had built a 'strong trusting relationship' with her tutor, and this support was enough. Another mentee (D150817:8) suggested an early meeting would have helped 'trust and openness', but she realised the difficulties involved in doing so.

Some trust felt unexplainable: "yes but I don't know how that happened – I just trusted her", as Garnet stated. However, interviews suggested there

were certain behaviours and attributes from mentors that could help in building trust and respect with mentees. Similarly, mentors felt there were behaviours and attributes contributing to their trust and respect for mentees. Trust evidently was a many-faceted concept for participants, although there were elements mentioned more than others by mentees. For example, "being listened to" (Pink, Scarlet); "knowing the conversation was confidential" and thus feeling able to be honest (Garnet, Hazel, Raven); the mentor sharing her experience and knowledge; and "not feeling judged" (Garnet, Hazel, Pearl, Sable) were all recurring elements among mentees. The most prevalent included the mentor being open and honest, and disclosing about herself, which resonates with the importance of finding connections. References to training and having the mentor role make up the biggest category, which, together with "both being part of NCT" (Blanche, Scarlet), suggests 'NCT-ness' is key to a mentor being trusted. Some mentees acknowledged their own willingness to be open and honest with their mentor helped to build trust.

There were few impediments to the development of trust and respect: one was time constraints – both in mentoring relationships and in mentees' lives. Again, this brings a tension with the need to share information about their respective lives and make connections. There were fewer repeated aspects for mentors, who had less to say around this area than mentees. Two aspects were the most frequent, one of which was having an effect, or being of use. The other was having good relationships with mentees, requiring time to fulfil. Impediments for mentors included lack of response, and mentees multi-tasking or being distracted during calls. Once trust had been built up, then mentees tended to be more open with their mentors, although conversely, some openness did help to promote the development of trust. Clearly there were many factors involved in the establishment of trust within dyads.

All the elements examined so far in this chapter combine to enable the development of both mentees and mentors. Mentees are supported through their experiences by mentors. This support, together with sharing values, sharing skills and a sense of organisational trust, in addition to the connections and the trust and respect experienced between mentee and mentor enables their development within the mentoring relationship. It is

this development, both professional and personal, that is the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

4.4 Development from mentoring

NCT's mentoring scheme was instigated to support practitioner development, as stated in the original scheme proposal (D120522:1):

> Every practitioner should have access to a mentor for short or medium term developmental or transitional circumstances or at times of crisis for extra support and opportunities for reflective dialogue.

Despite resource constraints limiting the reach of the scheme, development remained the goal, being integral to the definition of NCT mentoring (Appendix 2). An analysis of documents suggests the main intended effects of mentoring were increased levels of reflection and skills, leading to improved practice and better service to parents. A clarifying email (D120730) from NCT's HoEP noted that:

> As far as having a mentor is concerned – this is very much related to their 'practice'…the mentor is there to work with the student on particular issues within their practice that arise and to discuss their courses…

A further email (D141219) from the HoEP noted the wish to 'provide a focussed and personal approach to professional development'. In the first two years of the scheme the return rate for evaluations was 68% (D150817). Almost all responders evaluated mentoring as useful, with twenty-three out of the forty-six responders using a qualifier, i.e. 'very', 'extremely', 'highly' or 'immensely' useful. Clearly the non-responding 32% could have been very different. However, within interviews there was much to support the impression given in the Mentoring Evaluation Report (D150817) of mentoring being useful in terms of benefits to, and in enabling development for, mentees and mentors.

4.4a Evidence of development

It can be difficult to ascertain the impact of mentoring as sometimes effects are only tangible much later, and it can be hard to separate out the effect of mentoring from the general development of NCTPs. However, there were

moments within interviews, and sections within documents, which supported mentoring as developmental. All the evaluation forms analysed in the Mentoring Evaluation Report (D150817), with one exception, were positive, although several had constructive criticism to offer. It was acknowledged in the report that because the missing 32% of forms could represent negative experiences, it might be offering a distorted view of the success of the scheme. Perhaps a mentee with an unsatisfactory experience might not submit an evaluation form because they viewed it as a waste of time, or possibly because, despite the lack of benefit, they had no animosity against their mentor. This latter supposition is perhaps supported by Poppy speculating on her honesty to me if her mentor had been "awful and rubbish":

> …I would feel I'm only one person saying this – other people might have had a fabulous experience with her and it might just be that I'm a little bit belligerent and – not very open.

The documentary and interview evidence suggests most mentees found mentoring useful, and mostly very valuable, even when compulsory. Only one mentee, Raven, found little to be of use, although several mentees stated the support of fellow students and tutors was sufficient for their needs at the time (D170314:8). Olive had not wanted to be mentored by a stranger, and found initial exchanges with her mentor problematic. She avoided her mentor and told me she had lied about her reasons for doing so. Even so, when a difficult situation arose, her mentor was so supportive that Olive said she was:

> …fantastic…I would say – that the level of insight is just something I hope I can achieve one day…wow amazing…"I'm putting you on a pedestal right now"…so empathetic and – you know she could <u>really</u> understand me I felt – and it just seemed so natural…she was really listening to what I had to say.

There is little evidence of lasting development through mentoring for Olive though, but rather more short-term support through a difficult time, and perhaps the provision of an ultimate role-model. This suggests that mentoring can be supportive and/or developmental, depending on what is required. Poppy did not really want a mentor as:

> …I don't think that I particularly needed it – I felt that I could get good support elsewhere – but it didn't really bother me that I was going to be mentored and I thought it might be useful…

In fact, she did find it useful, although that seemed more of a realisation during the interview rather than her opinion beforehand. It is debatable whether the usefulness could be termed developmental, as when asked if she saw the mentoring as such Poppy replied "not really" although she also commented:

> …she was a good source of – helping me…because…she was mentoring me through my first teaching posts which were really nerve-wracking – you know she was good at getting me to organise my time and – be a bit calmer about things…

Pink reflected that the mentor had not only enabled her to work round a problem, but to avoid the issue arising in future:

> …people are going to ask me all these questions and I don't have the answers – and talking through that and then suggestions for how to deal with that and how to feel better about it – so how to manage the problem if it happened but also – what could you do to make yourself better informed and things like that…

One mentee reported she had 'the opportunity to consider challenges that I have faced' and come up with 'action plans to improve my practice in the future' (D170314:5). Another participant thought her mentor had helped her 'step back and review – often resulting in remarkable paradigm shifts' (D150817:6), suggesting a transformative mentoring experience. A third (D150817:13) said the mentor had:

> …tactfully guided me through how I wish to approach the situation instead of simply telling me "what she would do". This will be beneficial to me beyond my probationary year and beyond my mentoring time, as it will enable me to think through these situations alone and have the confidence to tackle whatever the issue is.

Another felt that 'she has helped me to put things in perspective and to reflect and develop' (D170314:7). This shows that, at least for some mentees, mentoring was developmental in a lasting way. Mentees considered their mentor had helped with their practice and in the affective domain, to develop personal attributes. Several mentees mentioned their emotional development, with the mentor encouraging them to 'see things less unhappily' or helping them to 'overcome these feelings' about their difficult situation (D170314:4). One mentee commented the mentor had been 'hugely helpful in my emotional growth as a practitioner' (p.7). Several mentioned gaining in confidence (p.6), and one felt the mentor had 'helped

to consolidate my feelings, thoughts and concerns and move forward with them' (p.8). Even Poppy felt "a bit calmer about" the first "nerve-wracking" courses that she was facilitating. This was clear evidence from mentees of their perceptions of their development in various ways through the mentoring scheme.

For some mentors, there was less confidence in this. Crystal commented:

> I think maybe it might be worth having a think about how we evaluate what we do…the change we're trying to – effect is so difficult to measure – that I wonder how we provide evidence…

However, there were indications for mentors of mentees making progress in various domains. Increased confidence was sometimes evident, or a sense the mentee was more comfortable with her situation, sometimes by the mentor normalising it for her. For Emerald, there was a sense that things were "obviously much clearer", or that mentoring had "almost made the penny drop there and then", but she was satisfied if the mentee saw herself as moving ahead. The sense of "adding value" for a mentee gave Sienna a stronger feeling of connection to her. Sometimes there was a more tangible sense of development when mentees were "enthusiastic to learn from the whole experience…and …really look at the areas that were picked up in the assessment" (Amber). There were times when Lavender made a suggestion and the mentee said "oh right!", and a "wow moment" for Jade when the mentee "got something". There were some instances of positive feedback from mentees, such as a couple of Crystal's mentees who have "come back to me and said actually do you know – what we talked about worked!" Lavender had pleasure in hearing a mentee say "oh I must write that down that's really useful", and mixed responses to "goodness this has actually been useful…but well of course you knew that already". So even reluctant mentees could find their work with mentors valuable, although whether it was developmental is difficult to ascertain. One factor potentially affecting how much use could be made of mentoring was what mind-set the mentee held about mentoring. This relates to two aspects: how prepared she was for mentoring, and her own personal disposition around being mentored.

Preparation encompasses activities or circumstances priming NCTPs to be ready to work together in mentoring relationships. This involves there being information available to mentees, socialisation happening with other practitioners who had been mentored, and preparation for mentoring sessions. The dispersed nature of NCT meant it was not financially viable to arrange mentees' meetings, and no other training was considered. Only written information was emailed to mentees, outlining the scheme and including suggestions for best practice (D160511; D160702). Mentors were briefed around the circumstances bringing an individual to mentoring, with information about the difficult situation if relevant. With probationary or NQ mentees, mentors received information around specialisms and contact preferences to enable some connections to be made immediately.

For some mentees, a lack of information in the scheme's early days was significant, which affected their overall experience. When mentoring was first proposed, it was a time of great transition within the charity. NCT's university partner and training programmes had to be altered to reflect the changing picture of the provision of higher education. The mentoring scheme was planned and written in 2012 (timeline in Appendix 3), and was introduced to the first group of students training for Essentials courses (NCT College, 2015-16) as they moved into their first year of practice as probationers in 2013. For this first cohort, numbers were small (fourteen in total), and processes were very much trial and error. During Raven's interview, she spoke about the dislike of her "guinea-pig" status in these events, and how that extended to mentoring too. Only five evaluation forms were returned from that first cohort, and for three of them, mentoring was unexpected (D150817:7). It is possible these mentees had not read, or at least not retained information sent out, as mentoring was clearly outlined in documentation (D160511; D160702). Raven admitted if she had been given anything then:

> …to be honest it clearly passed me by – which is quite possible – I'd be the first to hold my hands up and say things do pass me by.

This, along with a lack of guidance as to what mentoring was intended to achieve, plus their continuing support from tutors and peers, meant it was difficult to engage some early mentees. In Coral's experience, people did not always read everything they are sent, and as a result did not

understand what mentors were offering. It was a frustration for her, and for other mentors, how to engage some probationers in mentoring, when they were not reading available information. Several participants said they were not aware that their mentor was an EP; again, information sent out about mentoring clearly stated this.

Crystal and Jade felt that mentoring was not as well known within NCT as it could be, as a relatively new initiative. This could be related to the deficit approach to mentoring. Silver noted she had not wanted to let people know that she was being mentored:

> …but because I wasn't wanting to say [difficult situation]…I didn't want to bring up the mentoring either…I think it becomes a secret that you mustn't share…

It is also possible that written information does not have the same impact as spoken, as Rose commented "I think you need to hear things actually – you can read them but you do need to hear them as well".

The second cohort of mentees had been receivers of ill-feeling while students (pre-probationers), passed on within tutorial groups by some of the first probationer mentees. This socialisation led to some resistance to mentoring, and some low expectations noted in the Mentoring Evaluation Report: several mentees had not expected mentoring to be of much use (D150817:7). Mostly, they experienced it as useful; one to be of 'brilliant use!' Later evaluation forms (D170314) still featured mentees with low expectations because of feedback from previous years' cohorts. One said (p3) that she expected it to be a 'box-ticking exercise' from what she had heard. Two mentees felt it should be highlighted that mentoring was compulsory for probationers, and one of these also felt that more guidance was needed on the purpose of mentoring (D170314:11). Socialisation can work both ways: one mentee (p12) had heard mentoring was really beneficial.

This socialisation also applied to mentees who were interviewed. Marigold suggested that probationers:

> …either didn't seem to have anything – or they hadn't really engaged so it was difficult to know – what it was actually going to be like.

However, some of the probationers Marigold spoke to did have "very positive experiences". How much this contributed to her experiences of

mentoring being "amazing" is difficult to isolate, but perhaps at least partly she was prepared to have a good relationship. For Olive, there was a "negative connotation coming through" from mentees she knew. Other circumstances are detailed elsewhere, but Olive suspected that her wariness of mentoring:

> …may have been influenced by the other probationer telling us she had a not-so-good relationship with her mentor.

With regard to preparation for individual sessions, it was evident that interviewed mentors felt this was important for the mentee, and themselves. Most mentors kept careful notes which they re-read before the next call. It could be difficult to establish exactly how much it was useful to note down; Jade had felt it vital to write everything down at first. This was improving as she was learning to be more selective and efficient. For Emerald, it was useful to:

> …remember when they're teaching next and…something that maybe was an issue last time to see how they are this time – it seems to work.

Emerald felt it helpful to bring in the "important stuff" when it was relevant, recognising that not talking frequently to mentees meant notes were valuable. Being able to refer to mentees' circumstances made it easier to build relationships for some dyads, so Lavender kept careful notes to enable reconnection with mentees.

Mentoring relationships seemed to become easier and more effective if mentees were prepared. This included physically, being in a private and quiet space with notes ready, and psychologically with issues to discuss or questions to ask. Marigold considered that:

> …if you bring something to it – you'll get much more out of it – and it doesn't have to be much preparation it just has to be…"I had that really annoying person in my class" [laughs] – "how do I deal with that"…

Preparing questions proactively was a strategy used by a few mentees. For Pearl it helped to "concentrate the mind a little bit within the conversation". Even if there were only "two or three things" (Ruby), it was sufficient to gain more from conversations than if no thought went into it. Selecting the "most specific" question (Sage) and developing that, was an effective way of

using time. Crystal felt successful mentoring sessions strongly depended on how much effort mentees put into being prepared:

> …if you get somebody who has set aside time…she's prepared and she's thinking – and then you've got somebody who's on her mobile and doing the washing up at the same time and you know they haven't really devoted anything to this – you know it's not going to be very effective…

Without a sense of purpose to the mentoring session it could feel formless. One mentor (D170223:2) noted 'we need to know what they are expecting us to be able to support them with'. Pink suggested that her first couple of sessions "were slightly wasted" as she was not structured enough about it herself. Once she appreciated the value of following up a session "it really was very useful". Another mentee (D170314:7) also realised the need to prepare, stating that:

> At first I wasn't sure I had anything to talk about, but as time went on I had topics in mind before the phone call began.

Ruby was "very keen to make use of it" and reflected on what she needed from each session. The fact that Pink felt "it might be great" seemed to help her to make the most of mentoring once she had become used to the structure. Being prepared for a session also feels to be related to the internal disposition of the mentee. If a mentee saw mentoring as a development opportunity she was more likely to be prepared for it, and take follow-up work seriously.

Mentee disposition

What happens within mentoring, and what other support the mentee has, are not the only factors that determine how she experiences mentoring. The internal disposition of the mentee is also a factor; in Lavender's words "they're willing to engage with it then – that's fine – and if they don't then that's a different kettle of fish". Some mentees were apparently more focused on development than others, appearing to be determined to make the most of the opportunity to work with a more experienced practitioner. Blanche volunteered to take part in the scheme to help a mentor-in-training, hoping that it would be "a really positive opportunity". She admitted she was not necessarily:

…a default person who's perfect for mentoring…I could have dismissed it – but I think – because I wanted to use it as an opportunity – and kind of like squeeze it for all it's worth – it was really really good.

Ruby too was "very open" to mentoring, and "keen to make use of it – so probably came at it with that mind-set anyway". Others appeared less determined, but still prepared to make the best of mentoring. They approached it with an attitude of accepting their mentor, rather than welcoming. Silver had been "perfectly willing to engage" and Hazel said she felt she "had absolutely nothing to lose by trying it". Pink was willing to "give it a go". Rose began with a "fairly open mind thinking ok this is probably going to be quite helpful", although time-limits affected this positivity:

> I'm not really sure how useful this is gonna be – in the grand scheme of things two hours is a drop in the ocean…not gonna to do me any harm…

For a very few mentees, it seemed their perceptions of mentoring as box-ticking determined their level of interaction as low, and as a result little was achieved. One mentee (D170314) reported conversations with her mentor were 'pleasant and reassuring', but were 'something extra' she felt she had to do, 'rather than something I really benefited from' (p.8). She felt she had not 'engaged particularly effectively with the process' (p.9). It is difficult to ascertain cause and effect here.

There were evidently varying levels of commitment from mentees towards mentoring. Some were determined to find it of use, which they seemed to do. Some were willing to try, and mostly found it to be of use, while others were less willing and sometimes found little benefit. There were exceptions: Raven was excited by the opportunity to be mentored, but ultimately found little benefit. One aspect of disposition affecting both mentees and mentors was whether mentoring was approached from a deficit viewpoint.

Deficit approach

The quality assurance system within NCT occasionally highlighted 'someone's need to work with a supportive person for developmental purposes' (D120522:1), potentially because of a lack of knowledge or skills.

Thus, even when a mentee needed support for quality reasons, development was still the expectation, showing the two were not considered as mutually exclusive. Participants were asked whether they would be a mentee in future to explore if they held a deficit approach to mentoring. From responses to this and other questions it was clear some mentees, and even some mentors, saw mentoring not necessarily as developmental, but from a distinct deficit viewpoint, so there were mixed attitudes.

Mostly mentees said they would welcome being mentored again, although some answers were less positive. Olive would only be mentored if she could select her mentor, or at least meet face-to-face initially, and Poppy would only accept mentoring if compulsory, as she looked elsewhere for support. Several mentees were enthusiastic about the prospect: Blanche would "happily" work with a mentor, Cherry felt it would "be nice", and Clementine, Garnet and Marigold agreed they would willingly be mentored again. Some saw it as remedial work, particularly suitable for a post-assessment or complaint situation. Pearl saw it as useful when "things weren't going swimmingly", although she added it would be nice to access mentoring without "needing to." Hazel thought accepting mentoring meant admitting something was wrong in one's practice, and Scarlet talked about the "need" for mentoring. It was a "slap in the face" to be offered mentoring for Silver, at least initially: "I just kind of thought oh great…now I need to be mentored as well and that's rubbish". It would help if NCT made mentoring "a more positive thing – because otherwise it's kind of – why did you need a mentor – did you fail something?" Silver had not wanted to admit to being mentored as she did not want to reveal her difficult situation. It became a "secret that you mustn't share". She correctly pointed out no-one ever said:

> …"oh you're doing so great we'd love you to have a mentor to just – reflect on how wonderful you are" – you know you're never given a mentor to tell you – "you're doing well"…

Garnet recounted her enthusiastic promotion of mentoring after her successful mentoring relationship: "I do say to people why don't you go for mentoring and they go "nothing wrong with me"!" In contrast, she was aware that "if there's some concern about someone's work she can be referred to a mentor for some help and support". Blanche saw mentoring as an indication that the organisation was:

> …seeing that as something worth investing in…"this is a service that we're offering to support you" – if it's sold that way if people take it as a compliment – rather than – being – kept an eye on.

Mentees mentioned other aspects of deficit, such as Marigold's awareness of why probationers were mentored:

> …sometimes [it] was made abundantly clear that people thought we weren't ready to start – practising [laughs]…but in a kind of really positive way actually – but it was – an extra way that our hands could be held…

Olive spoke about honing in on a "weak point" with the mentor as a possibility, and Scarlet recognised that if her circumstances did not change, she would reluctantly need mentoring again.

There is much less evidence for this approach in documented mentee evaluations. One mentee (D170314:1) perceived mentoring 'to support me to help me think through some of the difficulties', and another was 'grateful to be offered a mentor and felt it to be an appropriate method of helping address the difficulties in which I found myself' (p4). Most mentees were probationers or NQPs who were all mentored, which did not single people out unlike in a post-difficult situation. However, in interviews, perceptions of mentoring did not closely align with reasons for being mentored. Some mentees in post-difficult situations were grateful to have the support and opportunity to develop, while others indicated a deficit approach only at first. Even some of the volunteers who had worked with a mentor-in-training showed an awareness of the potential stigma attached to mentoring (Garnet, Blanche).

Mentors also showed mixed attitudes when asked if they would be mentored; as Crystal commented, "if they've had a poor assessment there must be something that needs to be worked on". Some mentors evidently saw mentoring as largely working with deficiency. Emerald had "no problem being a mentee – you know if I had a complaint or something" while Jade felt if she had a big enough issue she would "value the opportunity to – to reflect on it" as long as she was being supported by someone with "at least equal experience or more experience." Amber responded strongly with "Well I sincerely hope not! – cos I don't want to [be] a post-assessment mentee." Other mentors had a more developmental attitude towards being mentored. Sienna welcomed the opportunity because she had:

…hit an issue with my own practice…in my own well-being – "oh I could have mentoring" [laughs] – so from that perspective kind of rather than – struggling on my own…"ooh I don't have to do this I could go and talk to somebody" – so that's been nice.

An image of a flower (no.33), possibly a dandelion, was used by Coral to explore the idea. She felt as a mentor she needed to counteract any perception of NCT viewing mentees in post-difficult situations as a "bit of a weed". However a mentor could be:

…somebody who you can talk that through with and actually is being provided for you by the NCT – this is suggesting that actually they're not wholly unwanted…

Crystal could "understand the benefit" of being mentored, but she did wonder if any mentor could engage, or if she would be "second-guessing" the work of her mentor. Emerald supported this view that a mentor might be nervous at working with another mentor in this way. However, Jade thought that she:

…might even learn a bit more about being a mentor – cos I'd be listening out for what they were doing – as well as – as well as how they were helping me – so – yeah.

Thus she saw that the experience could be a developmental one for her skills as a mentor as well as a practitioner.

4.4b Mentors and development

Mentors appeared to perceive their mentoring work as offering developmental opportunities, demonstrated in several ways. The Annual Report of 2014 (D140814) drew together mentors' evaluations of their work in the previous year, highlighting their perceptions of several aspects of development. These included mentors' own skills in both mentoring and in facilitation of their specialisms, mentoring processes overall, and knowledge about NCT in general. One mentor wrote (p.2) that she had learned:

…how to best start the relationship – trying to make the best use of the limited time that we have with each mentee (e.g. doing some introductory work by email). Gaining a real insight into life for the new practitioners which is helpful in terms of context. Has often made me think about my own facilitation.

Another said (p.1) she had learned a 'huge amount about listening, reflecting back and walking alongside the mentee'. A further mentor reported (p2) she had learned that she 'actually [has] good skills for working with people one-to-one'. The Mentoring Evaluation Report (D150817) added other examples of mentor development. One mentor felt she had gained a 'real insight into life for the new practitioners' (p.10), while another noted she had been led to 'reflect on my practice' (p.11).

These general points were supported by interviewed mentors, when asked how mentoring had affected their work as mentors and as practitioners. They perceived mentoring had increased their skills and confidence in their abilities to work with mentees. The training relationship with the volunteer mentee had helped with this, as Coral had realised:

> …you can only really learn by doing it truthfully – I mean you can read about it can't you – but reading about how to ask a question and how to…move somebody forward is very different from actually doing it…

Emerald agreed; the relationship with a volunteer mentee had been crucial to her confidence as a mentor:

> …the volunteer training mentoring – actually doing it was what made the difference…I evidently got the skills cos once I was doing it – it kind of clicked into place…

However, Emerald's confidence was tempered by her realisation of individuality:

> …every individual is different so I guess I'm still – whenever there's a new mentee…you don't quite know what you're going to be faced with…

It was not just the training relationship, working with mentees over time developed their skills too. Crystal reflected that she could be more effective in a shorter time frame than when she first became a mentor. Jade had "learnt a lot as well", particularly:

> …getting better at knowing – what questions or how to phrase the questions – I'm picking out the salient points in – what they're saying – think – you grow in confidence with each one that you do.

Working with mentees also appeared to have enhanced mentors' skills in their particular specialism. As dyads were matched mostly by specialism, the focus on mentees' practice was usually meaningful to mentors, encouraging reflection on their own work with clients. The innovative nature

of probationers' work served to enhance mentors' overall knowledge of NCT courses and services; mentors had to extend their knowledge bases, both within their specialism and in different specialisms, such as Amber with Essentials. These effects surprised Crystal as she had expected mentoring would be separate to her practitioner role. Both Crystal and Emerald had found it enhanced their listening and questioning skills. Emerald felt able to facilitate courses more effectively through using more open questions. This was particularly notable in her work with parents postnatally, as it enabled her to "help people to talk through" their birth experiences. This is not always easy as people often have disappointing experiences, and occasionally have traumatic ones, so processes enabling practitioners to support parents' birth and early parenting experiences are important.

The need to reflect on one's own practice while mentoring others was something Jade found enhanced her work as a practitioner. Jade and Coral also enjoyed being able to pick up ideas from mentees, and Coral found a particular improvement in one aspect:

> …we were talking about the balance between assuming that people learn by reading…and I suddenly thought…the activity that I do is mostly reading – maybe I might need to have a little re-think about that…

It is possible what participants saw as the contribution of mentoring to their specialist practice could have been the effect of time and experience instead. Lavender noted that "it's difficult to tell because…you're maturing as a practitioner at the same time". Jade agreed, suggesting "…you learn as you go…nothing stays the same does it – you wouldn't be doing a good job if it did". It may consequently be difficult to separate out the effect of mentoring from other influences on mentors, although this was not widely discussed by participants. Generally NCT training experiences change people. This was exemplified by Crystal, who felt mentoring was just part of the wider picture as she was a "completely different person because of NCT – completely different" because:

> …everything you do in NCT is transferable and everything is linked to everything else isn't it and things – that you've learned in one place – transformative learning which you take from here to there – it's all tied up together…

This idea links back to 'NCT-ness' and the organisational culture mentioned in section 4.1. It is mostly an unspoken and implicit understanding of NCT training and education, articulated by few participants in this study. It is not well documented, although there is some recognition of the potential on NCT's website. One breastfeeding counsellor student is quoted as saying (NCT 2017a):

> The course has fulfilled every need I have had whether I knew it or not. The course has taken me on a personal journey, there is a lot of self-reflection within the course and as a result I feel at peace. Both with myself and every decision I have ever made, the good and the bad.

Another student had this to say (NCT 2017b):

> This training has been an amazing experience for me… I have learned so much about myself, so much about motherhood. Much of what I have learned has seeped into the rest of my life, helping me to be a better mother, friend, wife, and manager in my day job. It's been so rewarding.

This transformative potential can be frightening as well as appealing, contributing to the necessity of support for students and practitioners.

Some mentors considered mentoring had contributed to their self-development. Coral had relished mentoring:

> …I'd much rather be doing something a bit – challenging – and certainly some [mentees] are quite challenging – so that I quite enjoy – something to get my teeth into a little bit…

One mentor (150817:11) saw her ability to plan for her own professional development as enhanced by working with mentees. Sienna felt mentoring and other training worked together to enable her to support practitioners in a more holistic way. For Amber it was a development of her NCT role to become a mentor.

Mentors were asked if their mentoring work had contributed to anything other than their practice, including outside NCT. Jade, Lavender and Emerald had all gained another NCT role through being a mentor, and Emerald was studying for a further one, finding her mentoring skills invaluable. NCT's HoEP commented, when interviewing for one post, that it was easy to see which of the candidates were mentors. Coral used the skills developed by mentoring in gaining two separate work-roles; one

inside NCT and one outside. Emerald had found a way to work with a friend in a difficult situation for which she credited her mentoring skills. Crystal felt it spilled over into her family life as evidenced by one child demanding "stop mentoring me". Sienna also commented on creating a reflective space for her children by using mentoring skills and Lavender considered that:

> …the really deep listening I would say is the greatest asset to all of my work and all of my roles – and my parenting – because that's the thing that has the most profound impact – the ability to just listen and keep listening and keep listening and keep listening – which is hard…

Mentors mentioned in interviews their willingness to learn and embrace opportunities for development. This included being open to ideas mentees had about their practice; Coral acknowledged mentoring as "mutually beneficial" and that "we've all got something to learn haven't we". This openness to learning was also demonstrated during interviews. Crystal reflected on how she began to establish rapport with her mentees and whether this could be improved:

> …perhaps if we would talk about something completely different maybe we could break down some barriers – I hadn't even considered – that it was about the nature of the relationship…

She commented that perhaps "we don't realise the impact that these things have on us – until you actually sit down and think about it." Jade and Sienna had also realised from the interview that they may not share enough of themselves with mentees, and planned to reflect on that. Lavender decided to make changes to how she approached reluctant mentees as a result of our conversation. Thus, for mentors, there were clear indications that mentoring work was viewed as being developmental for them in various ways. One of the most significant was enhancing their own practice, which largely depended on them working with mentees within their own specialism.

This analysis has drawn together findings from the interviews with mentees and mentors, and documents providing a context to NCT's formal mentoring scheme. The organisational context highlighted the culture of support; the idea of 'NCT-ness' incorporating shared values, shared skills and organisational trust; and the implications of a dispersed organisation. Important features of the scheme comprised rewards for mentoring, time implications, formality of mentoring with reference to compulsory mentoring

and to the matching of dyads, and virtual mentoring. Relationships are based on shared connections, particularly of specialism, and trust and respect. Evidence of development taking place was presented, including the impact of preparation for mentoring and mentee disposition, along with the deficit approach. Mentors were evidently experiencing development too.

4.5 Summary

This chapter presented the themes selected from the findings from interviews and documentation in four sections: the context within which the scheme was held, the features involved in the scheme, the relationships built by NCT mentees and mentors, and the development that has taken place for both mentees and mentors. The next chapter will analyse these themes with respect to relevant literature.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores and develops the themes presented in Chapter Four, in relation to existing literature on mentoring schemes and developmental mentoring. These four themes – organisational context for mentoring, features of the scheme, relationships within the scheme, and development for mentee and mentor – appear to be embedded together, as shown in Figure 5.1. Building on various elements of the case study findings the analysis suggests that understanding how NCT's mentoring scheme can be considered to be developmental relies upon the synergy between the organisational context, the nature of the relationships created and the way features and processes within the scheme operate.

Figure 5.1 captures the themes identified in Chapter Four and provides a structure for this chapter. Firstly, the presence of development is explored. Then, beginning with the outer ring of the organisational context the chapter considers each concentric ring inwards. Attention then turns to the overarching features of alignment with NCT's culture of support and valuing learning which reinforce the tailored nature of this formal, virtual, time-bound and paid mentoring scheme.

Figure 5.1 Patterns in themes
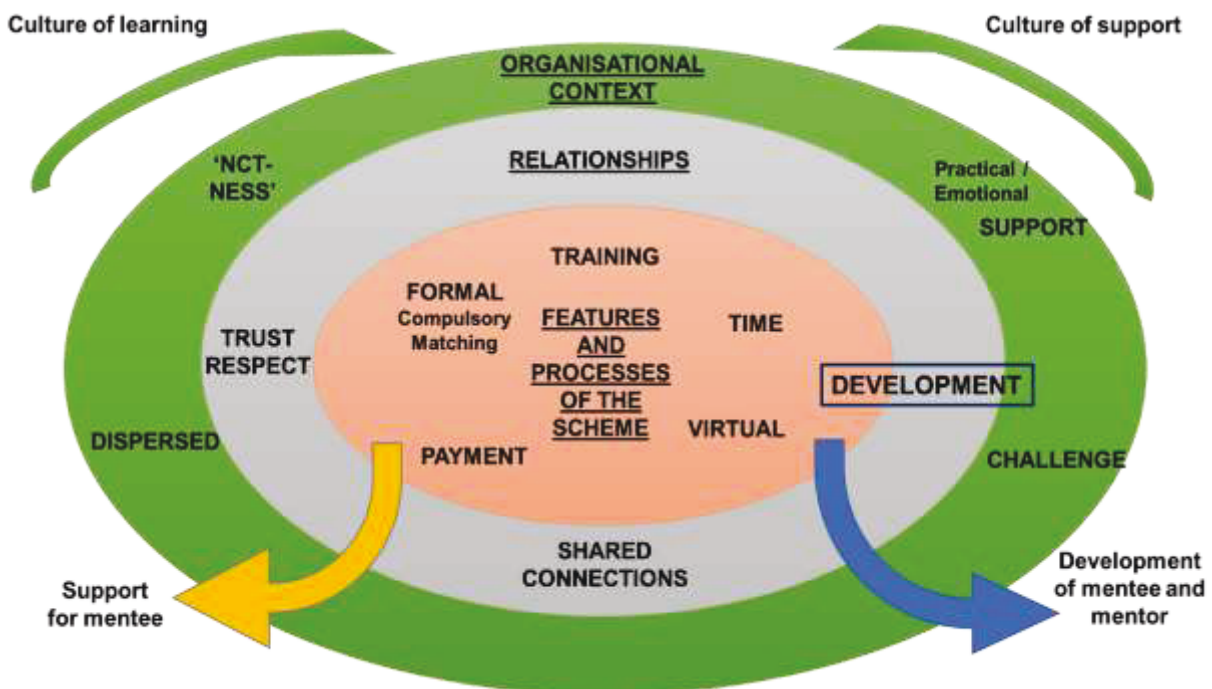
The main question of the study was how a formal virtual mentoring programme, with paid mentors working in a limited time-frame, can support self-employed birth and parenthood education practitioners in their professional development in the dispersed third-sector organisation, NCT. Some literature (Swap *et al.*, 2001; Brechtel, 2003; Ensher and Murphy, 2005; Underhill, 2006; Schunk and Mullen, 2013) suggests that formal mentoring, as an artificial creation, is less effective than informal mentoring. In addition, formal mentoring is typically considered to be an altruistic act and therefore mentors are usually not paid by organisations (Kasprisin *et al.*, 2008; Garvey, 2011). Mentoring also usually occurs via face-to-face interaction (Gray *et al.*, 2016) with strong connections to the mentor's use of the self to develop the mentee. Literature accordingly suggests (Wanberg *et al.*, 2003; Long *et al.*, 2012) it is much harder to mentor via virtual interactions. Mentoring is associated with the longer-term; some informal mentoring relationships last several years, although formal mentoring relationships typically last between six months and a year (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007).

Whilst all of these mentoring scheme features are considered in literature, nothing was found about NCT's particular combination of features. A common view expressed within literature (Clutterbuck, 2010; Terrion and Leonard, 2010; Hamlin and Sage, 2011; Irby *et al.*, 2017) was that these features of mentoring schemes require further study and in-depth understanding, hence the value of this investigation. Developmental mentoring is typically characterised as motivating individuals to learn and grow, exposing them to learning opportunities, and providing needed support (McCauley *et al.*, 1994; Douglas and McCauley, 1999). NCT's mentoring scheme with its features of being formal, virtual, with paid mentors, and time-bound (both in hours and duration), will struggle to offer developmental mentoring, according to literature. The findings of this study contradict this view and the rest of Chapter Five will explore this, following a discussion of the evidence for development in the study.

5.2 Development: expected and delivered

This section will summarise the evidence presented in Chapter Four demonstrating development of mentees and mentors. It will examine some

thoughts around why this development is possible, given that overall the literature (Wanberg *et al.*, 2003; Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007; Kasprisin *et al.,* 2008; Long *et al.*, 2012) highlights the challenges of operating a formal, virtual, time-bound and paid-for mentoring scheme as a developmental initiative. Evidence from NCT suggests these scheme features can be ameliorated. As can be seen from Figure 5.1 no single part of the scheme enabled the development of mentees and mentors, but rather the synergy of the context, the relationships, and features and processes in the scheme.

Evidence from interviews and documentation, including collated evaluation forms, demonstrates that most mentees who responded find mentoring a positive experience in terms of support and usefulness, which can be due to the quality of relationships (Kram and Cherniss, 2007). Support is experienced as short-term for a specific situation, or over more sustained time-scales. Lavender's thoughts about development resulting from mentoring as being inseparable from other experiences and influences are significant (Sanyal, 2017). Even so, there is evidence of development from many mentees in knowledge and skills or with emotional issues, such as confidence, echoing Garvey's (2011) summation of cognitive, social and emotional development from mentoring. Mentees feeling able to form action plans, or to deal with future situations, suggests long-term development has occurred. With mentors, there is evidence they perceive development in their mentoring skills, their specialist knowledge and skills, and in general NCT awareness. The fact that development is expected by NCT becomes a way of being for most practitioners, particularly those accepted as EPs, and is likely to encourage the use of developmental relationships, as Hall and Kahn (2002) suggest. It seems the mentoring scheme enables developmental outcomes for mentees and mentors because it is aligned (Baker, 2017) with the values and context of a supportive organisation where learning is manifest and nurtured.

NCT training and work develops the emotional intelligence of practitioners, and the nature of mentoring itself draws upon that emotional intelligence, enhancing the ability to build open trusting relationships, which contributes to development within dyads (Ehrich *et al.*, 2004; Gibson, 2005; Kram and Cherniss, 2007; Eby, 2012; Grima-Farrell, 2015; Richardson, 2015). Garvey (2009:82) comments that having a mentoring focus on either 'high-

flyers' or 'remedial' purposes can affect the developmental nature, with neither being useful towards development. The NCT study suggests that even those participants who view mentoring through a deficiency lens still tend to experience it as developmental, as they found their mentors' ideas and support valuable. Mentoring's alignment with NCT's focus on support and learning contributes to mentoring being developmental despite the mentoring scheme using features that would normally hinder developmental outcomes, and to the value of this study to the theory and practice of mentoring.

5.3 The role of organisational context in NCT mentoring

There is a lack of research considering organisational contexts (Sosik *et al.*, 2005; Chandler *et al.*, 2011; Baker, 2017) reinforcing the value of this study's emerging focus on the NCT context. Although a case study approach acknowledges the importance of the context, on returning to examine Figure 2.1, it was evidently not considered to be pivotal when summarising research questions and literature themes for this study, but rather has emerged as an unexpectedly strong theme. The organisational context holds the scheme and the relationships within it, and there is strong alignment between the organisational goals and values, and the scheme. NCT's core aim is to support parents (NCT, 2012a; NCT, 2017), and it is practitioners who are tasked with that work, with education, training and development enabling them to deliver NCT's aims. Practitioners are not employees (outlined in Appendix 1), and so this extends Baker's work on alignment (2017) beyond solely HR. Baker (2015; 2017) focuses on how HR practices and management goals can work together to enhance how an organisation works more effectively. She uses (Baker, 2017) a formal mentoring scheme with employees of an organisation to argue that alignment is displayed in three ways: vertically between people strategy and business goals, horizontally with people policies relating to one another, and through implementation of those policies to ensure aligned experiences for people. This current study extends Baker's work in that the vertical alignment is expressed through the values and goals shared by practitioners and NCT. The horizontal is expressed through relationships between practitioners, and the implementation is through how the features

of the scheme work towards supporting those relationships and values. This insight contributes new knowledge to the understanding of mentoring in organisations.

There are many mechanisms for supporting NCTPs (D141001), with mentoring becoming a key element. Literature (Kram, 1985/1988; Hale, 2000; Sosik *et al.*, 2005; Chandler *et al.*, 2011; Garvey, 2011) suggests mentoring relationships are formed by their organisational contexts, thus mentoring needs to be studied in relation to the setting (Jones and Corner, 2012). Almost all interviewed mentees see the organisation, as well as practitioners in general and mentors specifically, as trustworthy. Both the training for, and the role of, mentor are significant here. The latter aspect is connected to payment in some ways, in that a paid role appeases mentees' concerns about being a burden (Fagenson-Eland and Lu, 2004), and shows NCT valuing mentors and practitioners (Stewart-Lord *et al.*, 2017).

Organisational policies, such as reward systems, affect individuals' behaviour (Kram, 1985/1988), while structures and practices help to develop learning environments that enhance positive mentoring relationships (Garvey, 2009). Wheeler and Lambert-Heggs (2009:326) consider the success of mentoring depends on a context enabling 'generosity of spirit'. Mentoring schemes are shaped by organisational structures, cultures (through values and goals) and strategies (Baker, 2017), supported by participant observations and some of the documents informing this research. Three elements stand out for this case study: 'NCT-ness' based upon the culture of the organisation, the emotional and practical support and challenge based upon the shared values and goals of the organisation, and the dispersed nature of NCT as a feature of its structure.

5.3a 'NCT-ness' – the cultural dimension

A key element in why mentoring appears to be developmental is its fit with 'NCT-ness', expressed by participants as shared values, shared skills (discussed in section 5.4a) and organisational trust (section 5.4b). It also relates to attitudes that practitioners, particularly mentors, hold with respect to time spent on NCT work (section 5.5c). Overall, 'NCT-ness' enhances the development of relationships between mentees and mentors as it

enables expectations of behaviour, and a certain level of trust. 'NCT-ness' is an expression of organisational culture, which Fineman, Gabriel and Sims (2010) characterise as being made up of shared values, norms and meanings. Buchanan and Huczynski (2010:100) argue organisational culture is a controversial idea, but agree 'something' gives organisations unique identities. For NCT, it is the shared set of values evident in interviews and documentation, which are being recognised and reinforced by the mentoring scheme. These values are epitomised by Crystal's remark "whatever we're doing we're all doing it for parents", and Pink's "all…wanting to achieve a similar thing".

The values all interviewed NCTPs share involve working for the benefit of others and for the greater good. Whybrow and Lancaster (2012:68) refer to this as an 'alignment' of values; co-workers wanting to make the world a better place is vertically aligned to NCT's purpose of supporting parents (Baker, 2015). NCTPs are all aware of studies (such as Hrdy, 2015) showing parents' responsiveness to their babies can have huge impacts on families and on society generally (DoE/DoH, 2011). Consequently, practitioners tend to be passionate about supporting parents. They trust assumptions about other NCTPs, like confidentiality being embedded which, together with their shared passion, help to make mentoring relationships open and safe (Ryan, Goldberg and Evans, 2010). These factors also seem to be why the number of reported negative experiences is low (Eby *et al.*, 2000; de Janasz, Ensher and Heun, 2008). This supports existing evidence that when mentees and mentors share values, relationships are more likely to be sustained, trust, empathy and honesty are more likely to occur, and mentors' support is valued (Gardiner, 1998; Hale, 2000; Mills *et al.*, 2008; Wang, Tomlinson and Noe, 2010; Eby *et al.*, 2013).

5.3b Emotional and practical support, and challenge

Mentees overwhelmingly consider their mentor to be supportive; this was apparent in interviews and documentation (e.g. Appendix 7). Support can strengthen mentoring relationships leading to confidence and competence (Sanyal and Rigby, 2017). Both mentors and mentees show awareness of differences between practical and emotional support, which are both valued

and needed (Yagata, 2017). The friendship of women, "that nurturing thing that women do really well" (Garnet), is important here. Similarly, connections are made through usually being mothers as well as a commitment to NCT values. The images selected of women talking, a lighthouse, a strong rock and a safety net were used to highlight these perceptions. Support and shared connections enable discussions of deep personal concerns, which are important in NCT courses for parents, and so are embedded within practitioners. NCT mentoring supports new NCTPs, and those having difficulties, as they support parents through their transitions to parenthood.

Both interviews and documents show the support and safety elements that enable mentees to develop. Evidence of mentors' willingness and ability to challenge mentees indicates the presence of developmental mentoring (English and Sutton, 2000; Hay, 2000; Harrison *et al.*, 2006; Daloz, 2012). Ghosh (2012:169) examines the concept of challenge, suggesting that mentors 'nudge' mentees to try various teaching techniques, or of questioning mentees' assumptions and biases. These techniques were clearly demonstrated during interviews with mentors. Few mentees acknowledged mentors' challenges; potentially they were not recognised as such. Perhaps mentees were thinking of something more confrontational when they were asked about challenges from their mentors. Accepting challenging ways of thinking could come from the 'NCT-ness' identified. It appears that when mentors share the same values as mentees, have at least an overlap of necessary skill-sets, and share (for the most part) an organisational culture, they see fellow practitioners as supportive and trustworthy, and so challenges may go unremarked. As mentees feel safe and supported within mentoring relationships, challenge becomes about their development (Daloz, 2012).

It is suggested that the context of an organisation can have a profound effect on whether or not mentoring can be effective (Wanberg *et al.*, 2006; Clutterbuck, 2007; Sanyal, 2017), and the culture of support within NCT would seem to be a key factor here. NCT's ethos is explicitly taught to new students at induction (D160906) to reinforce this culture. This generosity of support (Wheeler and Lambert-Heggs, 2009) informed the mentoring scheme, as did the expectation of senior practitioners sharing knowledge and skills with new ones.

<u>5.3c NCT structured as a dispersed organisation</u>

Although mentoring has traditionally been associated with face-to-face interactions, changes in technology facilitate mentoring being offered at a distance (Clutterbuck, 2010; Bierema, 2017). The dispersed organisation, one across various geographical locations (Warner and Witzel, 2004), has challenges including organising workforce development (Fruhlinger, 2001; Ofsted, 2012). This may be exacerbated in a third-sector organisation with limited funds. As NCTPs are self-employed and work alone, they need to become semi-autonomous, so sharing knowledge becomes more difficult than in conventional organisations (Picot *et al*., 2008). Mentors, as skilled experienced practitioners, well-versed in adult learning, can share stories and experiences with mentees (Swap *et al.*, 2001), helping them to transform information into 'knowledge in action' (Merrick, 2017:197). Sharing knowledge could be mistaken for transmissional mentoring (Bozeman and Feeney, 2008) but NCT mentors regard this as being mentee-centred: it meets mentees' needs appropriately while enabling them to trust more, and thus facilitating the use of mentoring time for deeper concerns.

Being a dispersed organisation offers opportunities for enhancing openness between some mentees and mentors, while conversely creating barriers for others. Some mentees find being distant from their mentors gives a sense of privacy and anonymity, enabling them to be open (Owen, 2015), as they will not meet in normal circumstances. However, a few mentees are inhibited by the distance and would prefer a face-to-face mentor. Most are pragmatic: in a dispersed organisation this has to happen. Most practitioners are used to working at distances from colleagues and in the main, still feel supported by them. The distances involved rarely inhibit relationships being built within the NCT context.

In the literature review, very little was found about mentoring in a dispersed organisation, despite multiple studies on virtual mentoring, as they were frequently inter-organisational (Murphy, 2011; Lasater *et al.*, 2014; Richardson, 2017). Even Bierema's overview of e-mentoring in practice (2017) recommends face-to-face interaction where possible, which ignores the reality of dispersed organisations. This study therefore contributes

towards understanding mentoring in dispersed organisations. The presence of a culture of support and learning, the contribution of 'NCT-ness' representing shared values, shared skills and organisational trust, and shared connections, are all key to positive mentoring experiences across this dispersed organisation.

5.4 Relationships within the scheme and the organisational context

Moving from the outer circle of Figure 5.1 into the middle section brings the focus to relationships within the NCT scheme, and to the horizontal element within Baker's framework (2017) as how mentees and mentors relate to one another. This study adds to previous research on relationships within mentoring, challenging the necessity of an affectionate bond, and suggesting anything along the spectrum from a "necessary evil" to an "amazing" experience can still provide support, and in most cases, be developmental. Existing literature proposes that rapport between mentee and mentor will have an impact upon the effectiveness of relationships (Sanyal, 2017). This idea varies from a 'professional friendship' (Gardiner, 2008:51) to an affectionate bond (Bouquillon *et al.*, 2005; Ghosh, 2014) or someone who cares (Gibson, 2005) being essential for mentoring. There is agreement in the literature (Alred and Garvey, 2000; Hall and Kahn, 2002; Headlam-Wells, 2004; Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007; Chandler *et al.*, 2011; Ragins, 2012) that the quality of the mentee and mentor relationship is strongly associated with positive outcomes.

From interviews and documentation it is clear there are different intensities of relationship for participants. For some dyads it is "a necessary evil" (Olive), for others "professional" (Cherry, Silver, Sable), for some perfunctory (Raven; D170314), and for others it is a warm relationship of mutual respect and liking, such as Marigold's "amazing" experience. The varying intensity is not necessarily related to the quality of the outcome, as most interviewees describe their relationships as "business-like" or as "not close", but still experienced them as developmental. A more transactional nature to mentoring does not preclude development when mentees feel safe to state their needs and mentors are able to challenge (Daloz, 2012). Mentees consistently experience positive support, which challenges

Ghosh's (2014) conclusion that the offer of support depended on some closeness within a dyad subsequently generating feelings of safety.

Mentors note their efforts to build relationships with mentees are not consistently successful, suggesting no universal set of behaviours guarantee success, which reinforces the personalised nature of mentoring (Sanyal, 2017). However, interviews indicated support for literature suggesting relationships benefited from the mentee and mentor being alike in some way (Wanberg *et al.*, 2003), on them sharing values (Headlam-Wells *et al.*, 2005) and on mentors offering empathy to enable trust (Alred and Garvey, 2000). The in-depth nature of this case study indicates the quality of a mentoring relationship does not have to depend on relationship intensity, but instead suggests developmental mentoring can still be achieved when relationships are focused and time-bound, where shared values, organisational culture and practitioner connections are reinforced by the scheme, enabling trust.

5.4a Connections enhancing rapport in mentoring relationships

The value of connections in this study supports similar findings in previous studies, with Ryan *et al.* (2010) noting a shared passion for practice supporting positive mentoring relationships. Both mentees and mentors highlight the importance of shared specialisms, reinforcing de Janasz and Godshalk (2013), who also emphasise the importance of shared skills when e-mentoring. Shared connections, or similarities, between mentees and mentors are evidently important as they are mentioned both in interviews and evaluation forms; exemplified by Hazel saying almost anything helps to make a connection. Establishing commonalities enables the building of relationships so mentors and mentees can turn their attention to work (Eby *et al.*, 2013). There were some tensions recognised in the study as a result, as the limited time-frame meant social conversation either uses up mentoring time, or mentors discount time invested in it when calculating their work hours. This did not cause resentment among mentors as there appeared to be acceptance of the commonality of this attitude towards time among NCTPs.

Some aspects of relationship commonality, including ones such as being mothers, and being women, are present because of who is attracted to

working for NCT. Programmes are open to men (Macinnes, 2017), but none have applied. Although findings on gender in mentoring are mixed (Wanberg *et al.*, 2003), Allen *et al.*'s study (2005) suggests that gender similarity helps create successful mentoring relationships although if this applies where all practitioners are female is unclear. Studies of all-female schemes often appear to be set within mixed environments (de Vries *et al.*, 2006). There are suggestions that female dyads work more successfully in the psychosocial domain (O'Brien *et al.*, 2010; Murphy, 2011), even on-line (Smith-Jentsch *et al.*, 2008) which is perhaps reflected here, given the support mentees experience. Most NCTPs (and all participants) are mothers, as it is usually experiences of pregnancy, birth and early parenthood that draw attention to the value of NCT courses and services, and inspire women to participate. Opportunities for social connections are offered when mentors empathise with mentees about the difficulties of studying or working antisocial hours whilst caring for young children. This supports literature (Cox, 2005b; Wanberg *et al.,* 2006; Garvey, 2011) suggesting that both mentees and mentors having children will augment rapport. Rapport is further enhanced by connecting through specialist knowledge to NCT mentees, supporting similar findings from Mijares *et al.* (2013).

Most practitioners tend to display aspects of empathy, emotional intelligence, and warmth, which is not unexpected given Chun *et al.'s* (2010) finding that those with emotional intelligence are often drawn to occupations with social interactions. The use of empathy is suggested to be important in formal mentoring as it avoids (or ameliorates) the difficulties of beginning relationships between strangers (Blake-Beard *et al.*, 2007). This would help to explain how trust is developed (Cherniss, 2007) so quickly, particularly in virtual mentoring. The expectation of empathy and emotional intelligence in a mentoring partner, coupled with sharing skills and specialist knowledge, contribute to the development of trust. The importance of shared skills, particularly when mentoring virtually (de Janasz and Godshalk, 2013) is in enabling the expectation of behaviours and competencies from a mentoring partner, particularly of a mentor.

Interviewed mentees occasionally mention the importance of age similarity. Age as a factor is commonplace but not universal throughout the literature; in the more traditional definitions (such as Kram, 1985/1988) a more senior

figure is important, whereas others see peer group or reverse mentoring as useful possibilities (Smith-Jentsch *et al.*, 2008). It is clearly important to a few mentees that their mentor is a similar age, or at least not younger. This may fit with Kram's (1985/1988) definition of mentors as senior figures working with junior ones. However, age and seniority, or skills, are not necessarily closely linked within NCT as the entry point for students is not clear cut in terms of age or career point. Thus, older newly-qualified or probationary practitioners may be mentored by younger mentors, depending on career age rather than actual age (Darwin, 2000). Practitioners of long-standing are not invulnerable to failing assessments, and may still receive complaints from clients; again, they may be mentored by younger women achieving the gate-keeping status of EP early in their NCT career. The virtual nature of the scheme is significant here, as it is difficult to ascertain age by email or telephone (Ensher *et al.*, 2003), and age is not necessarily known in a dispersed organisation, perhaps explaining why it was only significant for a few mentees.

NCT training enables practitioners to encourage clients to make connections with one another, to form self-supporting groups to sustain one another through the transition to parenthood, and to model this process by being appropriately open about themselves. This openness, showing one is 'human' with similar issues or emotions, is suggested (Elsbach, 2007:279) to enhance the appearance of trustworthiness; again, this may contribute to the early ability to develop trust.

5.4b Trust and respect for one another

This study adds to the literature around trust in formal mentoring (Wanberg *et al.*, 2007; Finkelstein *et al.*, 2012), by demonstrating trust can be engendered through organisational trust mechanisms, and by shared values, skills and having similar experiences as NCTPs leading to expectations of abilities and of safe, confidential spaces (Figure 5.2). The development of trust appears to be one of the key features enabling mentoring in this case although not all participants recognised this. Olive felt "it wasn't that kind of a relationship", and yet, when she needed support, she turned to her mentor. It is difficult to believe that she turned to someone she mistrusted, so perhaps there was trust on an unrecognised level. For

all other participants, and in some mentees' evaluation forms, trust is acknowledged. This challenges some of the established evidence on formal mentoring relationships and trust (Wanberg *et al*., 2007; Finkelstein *et al.*, 2012), especially with regard to virtual mentoring (Bierema and Merriam, 2002; Buche, 2008). Given the time-frames involved, it also challenges Bouquillon *et al.'s* (2005) findings that trust grows slowly in educational contexts.

There appear to be layers of trust, for example engendered by both partners working for NCT, as organisational trust (McKnight *et al*., 1998; Hale, 2000) contributed to 'NCT-ness'. This is supported by Henttonen and Blomqvist's (2005) work on virtual teams, where being in the same organisation led to expectations of similarity and the development of trust. Generalised trust (Hezlett and Gibson, 2007) connecting members of an organisation provides a foundation of trust before mentoring begins and was high in NCT for those interviewed. This supports Fineman *et al.*'s concept (2010) of goodwill trust being based on an expectation of open commitment to other people, although Fineman *et al.* (2010) considered this develops much more easily in a face-to-face organisation than a virtual setting, or presumably, a dispersed one. Thus, the findings add to the existing literature here as generalised trust was very strong. These views were not universal in previous studies, as English and Sutton (2000) found a tension between mentors and mentees in the same organisation, making it harder to establish a safe space where trust could grow. This was certainly not the experience from this study and possibly does not apply in a dispersed organisation where a sense of distance enables most mentees to find mentoring a safe place. Results also challenge Zolin and Hinds' (2007) finding that without a first meeting, working dyads (rather than mentoring partners) would not establish high levels of trust.

This NCT study also indicates other reasons for the development of trust. Participants in the scheme have expectations of their partner's behaviour, based on the culture of support and 'NCT-ness', particularly shared skills and shared values including confidentiality. This supports suggestions that trust is dependent on shared values (Striukova and Rayna, 2008). These expectations seem to replicate known behaviour enabling preliminary levels of trust between mentor and mentee (Bouquillon *et al.*, 2005) in a non-dispersed organisation. There is also trust in (usually) older, more

experienced NCTPs having experienced the necessary learning and development, enabling them to work successfully within the organisation (Trorey and Blamires, 2006), and to know the organisation (Stewart-Lord *et al.*, 2017), thus offering a sense of security and safety.

NCT training generally meets with approval and trust, again reinforcing the idea of organisational trust. Some mentees feel that the mentor being trained, plus her experience through the same or similar journey to other practitioners, is enough to ensure trustworthiness. This relates back to shared skills and experiences enabling connections to be found in order to build relationships between mentees and mentors (Eby *et al.*, 2013). It is still unclear whether similarities are essential in order to generate trust, but perhaps this scheme shows they enable trust to be built quickly. It is clear that these layers of trust support and reinforce the mentoring scheme, although it is difficult to ascertain how much of the trust existing between mentees and mentors is a result of organisational trust and how much from individual responses to their working relationship (Sousa-Lima, Michel and Caetano, 2013).

There are reasons given by participants for trust within this study: for mentors it seems to be mainly when mentees are responsive and engaged, and when the mentor's time and role are acknowledged. Crystal and Lavender both felt this when mentees said their suggestions were useful, supporting findings (Young and Perrewé, 2000) of trust for mentors relating to how much effort mentees put in and how much they pay attention to what mentors have said as this behaviour appears to show respect. Mentees showing respect for mentors' time and efforts helps to engender respect and trust on the mentor's part, supporting literature suggestions that respect precedes trust (Stanulis and Russell, 2000; Finkelstein *et al.*, 2012).

For mentees, there are many aspects to why they feel trust and respect about mentoring relationships, but the most commonly recurring ones are feeling they were being listened to (Alred and Garvey, 2000; Young and Cates, 2010; Yagata, 2017), knowing the conversation was confidential, and consequently feeling able to be honest (Johnson, 2017), and not feeling judged (Riley, 2009). The expectation that confidentiality, one of the shared values constituting 'NCT-ness', is embedded within mentors is

therefore important, supporting findings (Wallace and Gravells, 2007; Leck and Orser, 2013) of confidentiality enabling the development of trust. The climate of trusting NCT training, including for becoming a mentor, instils a shared sense of integrity about confidentiality, which helps towards trust. Mayer *et al*. (1995) hold integrity as one of their three key elements to a person being found trustworthy, with benevolence and ability as the other two. Perhaps practitioners working for NCT are assumed to be benevolent as it is not well-paid work, and mentors are judged as able as they have passed the gate-keeping EP assessment, so these factors may also contribute to the development of trust. Being associated with an organisation seen as benevolent enhances the trustworthiness of both mentees and mentors (Elsbach, 2007).

Skills shared by practitioners (discussed in section 5.4a), including effective communication (Ragins, 2012) based on emotional intelligence and empathy, are valuable in helping towards trust. The showing of concern and care was found to be critical in creating trust in virtual teams (Henttonen and Blomqvist, 2005), which relates to the warmth most practitioners display. Interviewed mentees mostly feel safe in speaking to their mentors as they receive empathy and are listened to, supporting Hall and Kahn's findings (2002). Mentees are aware of the need to be appropriately honest and open (Wallace and Gravells, 2007; Hudson, 2016). Crystal believes her practitioner training enables her to create an environment where initial openness is possible, perhaps meeting Hazel's need to trust in something basic to engender deeper trust. The context of the scheme and the alignment with NCT values (Baker, 2017) enables the development of at least the beginnings of trust, with layers of trust added in by organisational trust mechanisms (Bouquillon *et al.*, 2005), and by the shared values, skills and connecting experiences between NCTPs enabling the expectation of skilled behaviour. This is especially important with regard to virtual mentoring (Bierema and Merriam, 2002; Buche, 2008) where mechanisms for building trust face-to-face cannot operate.

Figure 5.2 summarises the features within NCT's mentoring scheme that enhance trust and are discussed throughout this chapter and Chapter Six. From participants' views trust appears to be enhanced through four layers. The first layer is the organisational factors: the perception of NCT as a benevolent, trustworthy organisation with a culture of support, and the

presence of goodwill trust between members. The values shared throughout the organisation include confidentiality, which is reinforced by the third layer, NCT training. Secondly, the personal characteristics of women drawn to become NCTPs tend to include empathy, warmth, and emotional intelligence, and being mostly mothers facilitates connections. The next layer is added by NCT training which enhances or instils skills and traits such as open-ness, respect, and listening, contributing shared specialist knowledge and similar experiences to enable connections. All this enables expectations of behaviour and competencies.

Figure 5.2 Features enhancing trust in NCT mentoring.
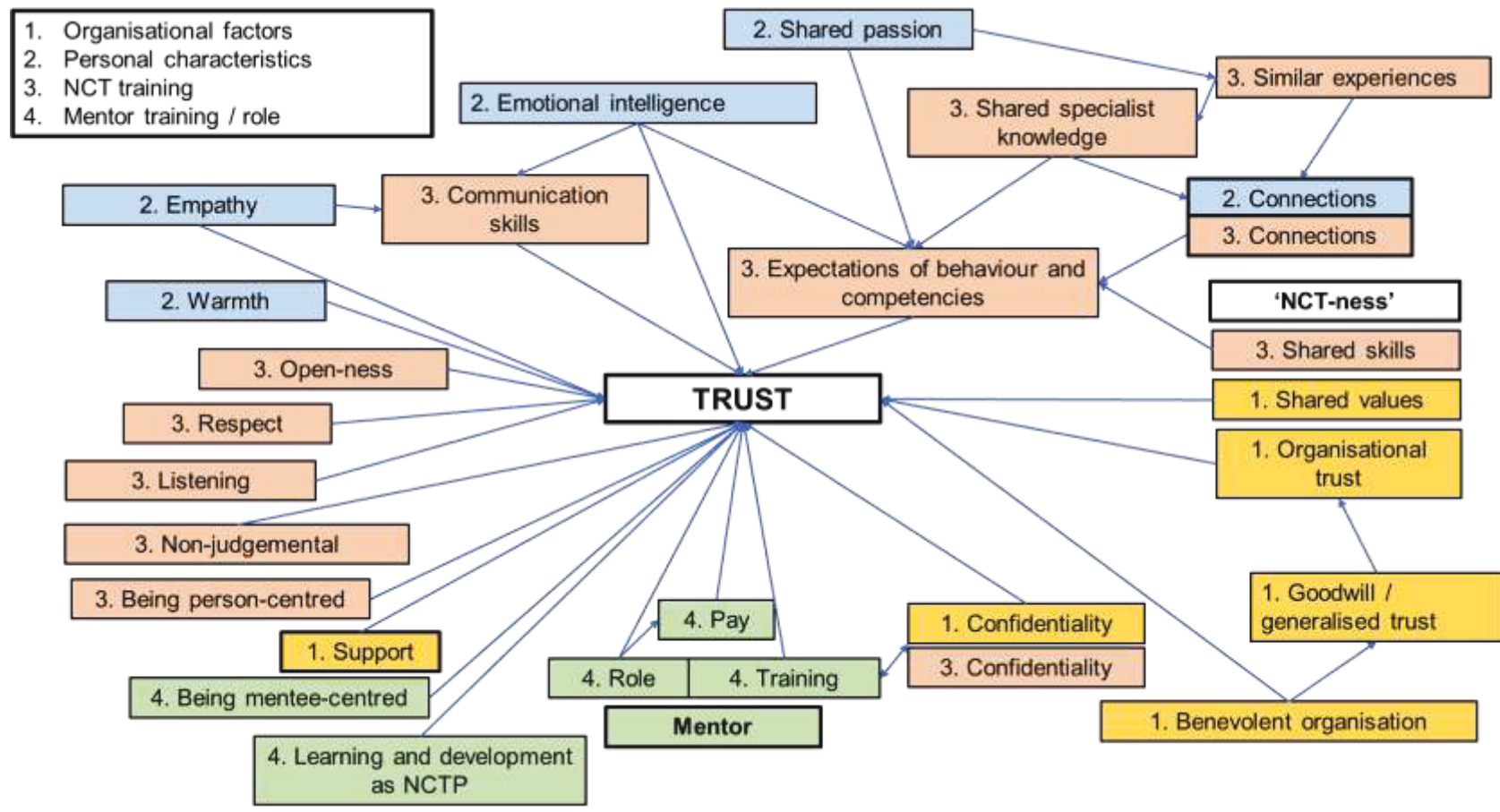
Finally, senior, experienced practitioners undergoing mentor training reinforces the shared skills, with the role (and the training) being trustworthy. These layers mutually reinforce one another to support trust in mentoring and work towards ensuring the focus of mentoring is development. This is a contribution to the literature around trust in organisations as well as in mentoring.

5.5 Features within the mentoring scheme

On Figure 5.1, having considered the context and the relationships created, the focus now moves to the central area where the emphasis is on the key features and processes within the scheme, how these are inter-related with NCT being a third-sector dispersed organisation, and how they affect mentees' and mentors' experiences of mentoring within NCT. These features are that it is a formal scheme, it is virtual, time is limited and mentors are paid. The processes involved are the matching of dyads and training of mentors. Together they form the third part of Baker's (2017) framework – of implementation. As previously mentioned, the strong suggestion from the literature review is these features are not likely to be as effective as informal, face-to-face, voluntary mentoring, without imposed time-limits.

5.5a Formal mentoring as a route to developing practitioners

Research on formal mentoring is limited (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007) in comparison to research on the effects of informal mentoring, suggesting that further insights into formal schemes are valuable. Formal mentoring as facilitated by NCT is a visible phenomenon (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007) and is a recent innovation for NCT (as outlined in Appendices 1 and 3). When the new educational programme was needed, NCT's Executive expected the Education and Practice Department to formulate a suitable one, to be approved by the university and NCT Executive. Similarly, given my experience and embeddedness within the organisation, the HoEP trusted me to develop appropriate training for the new role of mentor and run the scheme aligned with NCT values (Baker, 2015). Initially, the number of mentors was small, and even at the time of

writing there are only twelve mentors in the scheme (although another nine in training). The scheme's achievements could be considered disproportionate to the low number of mentors. Over 200 mentees have been supported so far, with connections being built across the dispersed organisation. There is evidence of knowledge being shared by both mentees and mentors, and of skills being enhanced by mentoring.

As previously mentioned, the scheme began with an unconsciously embedded alignment with organisational goals rather than a strategic and deliberate policy to do so (Baker, 2017). This has had the effect of creating a dynamic scheme, which has developed along with the theoretical knowledge possessed by the coordinator, and the practical experience of how mentoring has worked within the NCT context. The sub-theme of preparation within the theme of development (section 4.4a) supported evidence that mentoring is easier if mentees are prepared, or trained (Kasprisin *et al.*, 2008; Finkelstein and Poteet, 2010), or at least oriented towards mentoring (Garvey, 2009). The lack of effective preparation in the early days of the scheme seems to have contributed to the compromised nature of Raven's experiences, which might have been avoided by careful use of guidelines (Finkelstein and Poteet, 2010). This study is likely to have missed other early mentees who were difficult to engage and returned no evaluation forms, but they also might have had different experiences if more preparation had been evident.

The low numbers at the start of the scheme meant pragmatism played a large part in the way it was operationalised. Matching processes, for example, were not sophisticated, although this is fairly normal for a small scheme (Eby, 2012). So, while literature may suggest a formal scheme should be set up to resemble an informal one (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007), some aspects have not been possible, such as allowing mentees to select their mentors from a trained pool (Ragins and Cotton, 1999), or from a small selection (Clutterbuck *et al.*, 2016), due to low numbers of mentors (Eby, 2012).

The reasoning behind matching decisions is not documented, except in private emails to mentees and mentors, so background knowledge here is from being an insider-researcher. It is policy in the NCT scheme that people are matched by specialism where possible, although it was impossible when a new course for parents was introduced without mentors trained in that specialism. For the most part, mentees and mentors in the current study are happy with their mentoring partner as long as either they share a specialism (Mijares *et al.*, 2013), or the mentor is perceived as experienced and skilled. This may be explained by Riley's (2009) study that showed mentees minded less about being assigned by the organisation when mentors were skilled. Despite the limited numbers of mentors, and the unsophisticated matching system (Eby, 2012), the outcome here seems to have been generally good for most mentoring dyads.

Ehrich *et al.* (2004) suggest it is useful to have a good match between mentees and mentors in formal programmes, although there is debate as to whether matching should be made with similarities or differences in mind (Hale, 2000; Cox, 2005b; Eby, 2012). At least one similarity to enable rapport with enough difference to enable mentee development (Wanberg *et al.*, 2003; Garvey, 2011) may be useful. The shared body of specialist knowledge enables practical conversations, with shared understandings and ways of working (Mijares *et al*., 2013). Most mentees are consulted about communication preferences and other needs, involving them in matching decisions, which is seen as important (Wanberg *et al.*, 2003; Allen *et al*., 2006a; Blake-Beard *et al*., 2007). For mentees in post-difficult situations, mentors with appropriate skill-sets are found to suit their particular circumstances and action plans. These decisions enable some similarities (Wanberg *et al*., 2003) without matching too closely (Cox, 2005b). Volunteer practitioners are simply paired up with mentors-in-training in the same specialism. The lack of consideration of any other similarities has not elicited any unfavourable feedback in interviews or documentation.

It is possible the similar skills, values and passions all NCTPs have are enough to be compatible, perhaps because mentors use connections to enhance rapport (Cox, 2005b). Thus, this study supports some research

(Cox, 2005b) around matching, as it need not be necessary to use complex matching systems to enable developmental, or supportive, mentoring to occur, as long as there are connections between mentees and mentors.

<u>*Compulsory mentoring for some mentees*</u>

For some mentees, compulsory mentoring is part of their NCT programme, supporting their development as new practitioners. This is not unusual: there are many instances of mentoring being compulsory in the worlds of healthcare and education (Orland-Barak and Hasin, 2010; Murphy, 2011; Cooper *et al.*, 2014; Mckew, 2017). However, some studies (Bierema and Merriam, 2002; Bozeman and Feeney, 2007) suggest that imposing mentors onto mentees is not useful. In this study, mentees evidently value support from mentors even when mentoring is compulsory, or when perceived as compulsory (Silver). Other effects of this compulsory nature are mostly negligible; even the one interviewed mentee who objected to being compulsorily mentored (Poppy) still found elements of the experience valuable. This might be explained by Orland-Barak and Hasin's (2010) proposition that the importance of connections mitigates the compulsory nature of mentoring. These connections can be particularly crucial in enabling successful mentoring over distances (Lasater *et al.* 2014).

For some probationers mentoring was a box-ticking exercise, but it was not necessarily because it was compulsory. It was sometimes because the mentee was disappointed with the process (Raven), or because the mentor was a stranger (Olive). Other mentees began by seeing mentoring as box-ticking, but were soon engaged and found it developmental and/or supportive, evidenced both in interviews (Marigold, Rose) and from evaluation forms (D150817; D170314). Views in literature that compulsory mentoring results in less effective mentoring would not appear to be supported by this study, which therefore strengthens evidence (Allen *et al.*, 2006a) that voluntary participation does not increase the quality of mentoring.

5.5b Virtual mentoring to bridge distances

The limited research on virtual mentoring (Irby *et al.,* 2017) supports the value of this study. There are conflicting views in literature on whether virtual means of contact are as effective as face-to-face mentoring, with Ensher and Murphy's overview (2007) suggesting there were fewer studies providing empirical evidence for virtual methods, and that the richness of face-to-face relationships may be difficult to replicate. Buchanan and Huczynski (2010) argue that distance working is against human instinct, and gathering information to form trusting relationships is more difficult through technology (Zolin and Hinds, 2007). In NCT, the fact that mentee and mentor are separated by distance and work virtually is mostly accepted pragmatically. There were exceptions, but even those mentees generally did not have a poor experience of mentoring, perhaps, as de Janasz *et al.* (2008) suggest, because the shared values between dyads support virtual mentoring. As female mentors may be better at forming on-line relationships than male mentors (Smith-Jentsch *et al.*, 2008), it could be this acceptance is combined with at least a professional virtual relationship. Some mentees, and mentors, experience direct benefits from using technology, including valuing the anonymity provided (Lechuga, 2012), with ages and appearance being masked, and that they could stay at home with no need to travel or find childcare, thus balancing the suggested difficulties of building rapport in virtual mentoring (Richardson, 2017). The increased opportunities for reflection found by some mentors support Bierema's (2017) claim that virtual mentoring has a higher capacity to promote reflection and learning.

Most dyads use telephones despite Clutterbuck's view that it is a method with 'inherent difficulties' (2010:17). This is perhaps borne out with some mentors finding mentees multi-tasking or being distracted and some mentees acknowledged this too. This may explain some mentees' dislike of using Skype, despite their wish to see faces, although Owen (2015) found videoconferencing a distraction rather than an enhancement of virtual mentoring. Videoconferencing is seen as required by Buchanan and Huczynski (2010) to build trust between dispersed team members, which is not supported here, although they do acknowledge that issues with technology can be alienating.

Some participants in this study prefer to use email, some telephone, and some Skype, so the fact that the literature is conflicted about which method is most suitable (Clutterbuck, 2010; Sanyal and Rigby, 2017) is perhaps irrelevant: mentoring is so individual that methods cannot be prescribed. This appears to support Buche (2008) noting that one partner imposing a method on another created resentment. The mentee participants find working virtually fits better with their young families and other complications in their lives, supporting Bierema (2017). In contrast, NCT mentees sometimes say that some face-to-face contact would be of benefit, supporting thoughts around blended mentoring (Murphy, 2011; Sanyal and Rigby, 2013; Bierema, 2017), but contradicting Thompson *et al.*'s (2010) finding of some face-to-face interactions being essential. Even so, there is evidence to suggest in the NCT context that using virtual methods for mentoring is useful for mentees, as it does not seem to limit support for the resources allocated, and enables development for both mentees and mentors. This supports literature suggesting virtual mentoring is an acceptable way of working (Headlam-Wells, Gosland and Craig, 2006; Bierema, 2017), and adds that it may be irrelevant to work out the most suitable media, as individual preferences are more significant.

5.5c Time-bound mentoring

Most mentoring, whether formal or informal, has limits of some kind even if it is just the availability of the mentee and mentor, but time-limits are rarely imposed. Some studies (Headlam-Wells, 2004; Gibb and Telfer, 2008; Smith-Jentsch, 2008; Gut *et al.*, 2014) consider that limiting mentoring time restricts effectiveness, although this study supports evidence (Single *et al.*, 2005; Kasprisin *et al.*, 2008; Kadivar, 2010; Hennissen *et al.*, 2011, Eby, 2012) that short time periods (in both hours and duration) can be effective at both supporting and developing mentees, and enabling development for mentors too. More time is not necessarily the answer (Locasale-Crouch *et al.*, 2012), although, as mentors spend extra time with mentees, it is difficult to know exactly how many hours are accrued. This is clearly not uncommon in a formal programme, as Cooper *et al.* (2014) reports. This may be a typical aspect to viewing time among mentors, whatever context they inhabit.

The time-bound nature of mentoring fragments experiences of mentoring for some mentees and some mentors. Mentors tend to use strategies to enable them to keep in touch, such as emails in between calls (Murphy, 2011) or discounting social conversation time. Even emails can be a burden however, as reading and planning responses takes extra time, and this is also identified by Cooper *et al.* (2014). Despite the time-limits, mentees still find their mentoring experiences to be positive, supporting Kalen *et al.*'s findings (2012) that infrequent meetings, albeit face-to-face, with allocated mentors enable positive personal relationships. Both Kalen *et al.*'s (2012) study and the current study suggest time between meetings is not necessarily a bad thing, as it permits reflection and growth.

Time restrictions have been found (Riley, 2009) to reassure mentors (and mentees) that they will not be overstretched by a mentoring relationship, and to give a focus, just as some individuals find in this study. Riley (2009) suggests if mentoring relationships are trusting ones, with mentors trained in relational skills and enabling challenging conversations, then the impetus provided by time-limits will ensure no time is wasted, which agrees with experiences in this study. Time-limits can encourage mentees to prepare more effectively, as Sage did. Despite Mills *et al.* (2008) considering time-limits mean engagement and trust being more difficult to build, this is not the experience for most dyads within NCT. This study suggests limited time-frames can work if strategies are used by mentees and mentors to make the most of the available time, and if there are enough personal and organisational connections to enable relationship building to take place quickly. However, this is a guarded conclusion, as there are mentees and mentors for whom the time-limits are not adequate, so flexibility around time may be needed. It is acknowledged, particularly by mentees, that NCT recognising, and valuing by payment, mentoring as a separate role protects mentoring time, avoiding frustration found in other studies (Buche, 2008; Lach *et al.*, 2013).

5.5d Training and payment of mentors

Despite it being unusual to pay mentors (Gerstein *et al.*, 2004; Kasprisin *et al.*, 2008; Garvey, 2009), in the organisational culture of NCT it is normal to train for another specialism, or another role such as mentor or assessor,

and be paid for that new work in recognition of the studying involved. NCT mentors are trained (Appendix 1), which is a 'good thing' (Garvey and Westlander, 2016:261), and raises the 'success rate' (Clutterbuck, 1998:128) of mentoring. They are expected, through an assignment, to demonstrate learning and reflection before they can become a paid mentor. This training is trusted by mentees; they expect mentors to be trained, as well as emotionally competent due to shared skills as practitioners. The training of mentors therefore contributes to organisational and personal trust.

In this scheme, payment for mentoring is acceptable to mentees and is welcomed by mentors, who are often continuing informal mentoring relationships without payment. For both mentees and mentors, payments to mentors serve to professionalise the role which is seen as positive. 'Professionalise' is used by participants in a different sense to the social norming process in Garvey (2011), perhaps suggesting a sense of responsibility instead, or authenticating mentoring as a work activity (Garvey, 2009). Professionalisation is not fully addressed in the mentoring literature, although Hegstad and Wentling (2005) suggest that linking participation in mentoring to rewards can enable it to be seen as a professional role rather than a voluntary project, further supporting these findings.

This study finds paying mentors protects time for mentees, avoiding frustration on their part, and preventing other work pressures squeezing out mentoring time. Mentees do not feel like burdens when mentors are paid to listen (Fagenson-Eland and Lu, 2004). Together, these features suggest paying mentors as a separate role could be a useful addition to supporting mentoring within organisations. This supports literature considering payment for mentoring as suitable (Terrion and Leonard, 2010; Cooper *et al.*, 2014), and adds that it professionalises it, protects time and reduces frustration for mentees.

5.6 The importance of support and learning in NCT mentoring

What seems to enable mentoring to be developmental in NCT is the alignment with the organisation's values, culture and structure and its orientation towards learning. Garvey (2009) refers to a mentoring

organisation as one where organisational and individual goals are compatible. This compatibility was unconsciously guided by my experience, rather than being a strategic alignment with NCT's long-term goals and vision (Baker, 2017). It seems unlikely that anyone not embedded in the organisation could have built the scheme in the same aligned way, as knowledge of the context is vital (Garvey, 2009).

Two inter-related, overarching features of alignment are referred to throughout this chapter: both support and learning being valued in NCT (NCT, 2016). The organisation is based on a culture of support for parents and for practitioners, and with values shared by practitioners and others in the organisation. The aim of clients developing into confident, happy and supported parents, with the knowledge and skills they need to do so, is the ultimate purpose of all NCT work. Practitioners tend to be aligned with this purpose (Whybrow and Lancaster, 2012), as NCT was first set up to support women, then later parents, and practitioners show commitment to this work. There may be practitioners who have other motives, but these are likely to be in the minority. NCTPs are expected to continue learning and developing to support parents more effectively (NCT, 2016).

The mentoring scheme therefore has been written, and is implemented, alongside policies to enhance the development of practitioners, within the culture of support and development. NCT expects that practitioners will participate in ongoing self-development, and support their colleagues, although the current study shows not everyone experiences this in the same way. The mentoring scheme is aligned with NCT's organisational goals (Baker, 2017) and provides opportunities for self-development (Hay, 2000; Hamlin and Sage, 2011) with the support and experience of senior NCT practitioners, who have passed the EP assessment and mentor training. NCT mentors can provide support as mentees self-develop, or stimulate growth through challenge (Eller, Lev and Foureur, 2014).

NCT mentoring appears to do more than simply support practitioners, or enable their development as was originally intended. It enables connections for practitioners that will become more embedded as the scheme grows, and enhance the alignment to organisational aims (Baker, 2017). Ultimately, all NCTPs will have been mentored when they are newly-qualified, which will contribute towards reducing isolation within this

dispersed organisation. Connections work towards building social capital (Striukova and Rayna, 2008; Chun *et al.*, 2010) and trust (Hezlett and Gibson, 2007), in line with organisational values (Baker, 2017).

There is limited research on mentoring in dispersed (Emelo, 2012; Richardson, 2015) and third-sector (Ramalho, 2014) organisations. NCTPs are not employees so this is not a standard workplace mentoring scheme. Mentoring schemes can be designed and built in line with organisations of all kinds, but the critical aspect is that an in-depth knowledge of the organisation, and an understanding of the culture and values, is crucial. This study adds to the understanding of mentoring theory and practice by highlighting the importance of alignment of formal schemes with organisational values of support and goals of learning and development.

The main question of this study has been how a formal, virtual, time-bound and paid-for mentoring scheme could be developmental. Figure 5.1 displayed the overarching themes from the analysis of data from this study. In contrast to Figure 2.1, the idea of the organisational context emerged as a strong theme as it contains and shapes the scheme, and provides the values and goals with which the mentoring scheme is aligned. The study extends knowledge of formal mentoring schemes by demonstrating that virtual methods of contact, limited time and paying for mentors do not limit development. The framework provided by Baker (2017) has been extended beyond the HR and management basis into an organisation where self-employed practitioners work on behalf of a third-sector, dispersed organisation.

5.7 Summary

The territory explored by the literature review was appraised in terms of why this mentoring scheme should not work as a formal, virtual, time-bound and paid-for one, but nevertheless does so. In the next chapter, the study will be concluded, with recommendations for the practice of mentoring, and with theoretical contributions to the body of knowledge around mentoring.

Chapter Six: Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter re-examines the aim and objectives for the study and identifies how these have been achieved. It identifies the contributions made to both the theoretical and practice areas of mentoring, and provides recommendations for practice and further study. Finally, I consider the limitations of the study, and reflexively examine my own experience.

6.2 Revisiting the research aim and objectives

My aim in this study has been to explore how a formal virtual mentoring programme, with paid mentors working in a limited time-frame, can support self-employed birth and parenthood education practitioners in their professional development in the dispersed third-sector organisation, NCT.

My first objective was to critically review literature relating to mentoring, across certain relevant sectors specifically in relation to formal, virtual, paid and time-bound mentoring. Chapter Two evaluated literature around developmental mentoring with insights into the deficit model and the influence of purpose. Formal mentoring, involving time-bound and compulsory mentoring with centralised matching, was examined. In addition, issues were considered around virtual mentoring, rewarding mentoring, features of quality mentoring including trust and respect and inferior mentoring. The literature review concluded that in theory the NCT scheme should not be developmental, as it contains features that arguably limit mentoring (Kram, 1985/1988; Brechtel, 2003; Bozeman and Feeney, 2007; Ensher and Murphy, 2007; Kasprisin *et al.*, 2008); so the combination of those elements was unlikely to be experienced as developmental.

The second objective was to explore the experiences and practice of mentoring within a dispersed third-sector organisation through a single case study approach. Chapter Three described and justified the methods used in this exploration. Twenty-four participants were interviewed, and eighty-two relevant documents were examined, covering the planning and processes of the mentoring scheme, plus pertinent meeting notes. Evidence from interviews and documentation was analysed thematically, and findings were presented in Chapter Four organised into four main

themes: the context within which the scheme is held, the features within the scheme, the relationships built by NCT mentees and mentors, and the development that has taken place for both mentees and mentors.

The third objective was to analyse the findings in relation to existing literature on formal mentoring schemes. This analysis was presented in Chapter Five, where it appeared that understanding how NCT's mentoring scheme could be considered to be developmental relied upon the organisational context, the nature of the relationships created and how features and processes within the scheme operate. As such, Chapter Five drew together the strands of the research and identified where this single case study supports some of the existing literature, while challenging and extending knowledge from other studies.

The final objective was to contribute to existing theoretical knowledge and understanding, and professional mentoring practice, specifically in relation to how formal, virtual, paid-for and time-bound mentoring can be developmental within a dispersed organisation.

The aim of exploring how NCT's mentoring programme could support the development of practitioners has thus been met by examining the case through interviewing participants and analysing relevant documentation. This study has shown that despite the limitations imposed by formal, virtual, time-bound and paid mentoring within a dispersed organisation, mentoring can be developmental, both professionally and personally. This is because of an aligned culture of support and learning within the case organisation, and the element termed 'NCT-ness', together with the connections between individuals, all of which enable trust and the expectation of development. 'NCT-ness' was comprised of the shared values and skills, and organisational trust, that were important to participants, and featured in documentation. A minor theme within 'NCT-ness' was the flexible attitude to time shared by NCTPs. All these features contribute to a positive experience for participants, and enable the expectation of behaviour of mentors, and to a lesser extent, of mentees. Mentees may show different dispositions to being mentored, hence some inconsistency of behaviour and as a result, expectations.

The research was approached from a subjectivist, or relativist stance (Duberley *et al.*, 2012), with an ontology of interpretivism and an

epistemology of constructivism (Crotty, 1998:5), while acknowledging the multiplicity of viewpoints existing in this area (Jones *et al.*, 2014). A case study approach was used as it was considered to be the most appropriate methodology (Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2014). As a staff-member of NCT, I encountered challenges associated with insider-research (Chavez, 2008; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009), which were explored in Chapter Three and are revisited in this chapter.

6.3 Conclusions and contributions to theory

Overall, findings from this study challenge the existing literature that suggests that formal, virtual, time-bound and paid-for mentoring cannot be developmental, and show the value of this study to theory and practice. The lack of existing literature exploring the combination of the features of NCT mentoring, and the need expressed in literature for further research to explore these features (Clutterbuck, 2010; Terrion and Leonard, 2010; Hamlin and Sage, 2011; Irby *et al.*, 2017), the organisational context (Sosik *et al.*, 2005; Chandler *et al.*, 2011; Baker, 2017), and formal mentoring (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007) also highlight the value of this study. This study adds to literature (Lejonberg *et al.*, 2015) around developmental mentoring by extending the definition to include more transactional mentoring.

This study agrees that alignment between a formal mentoring scheme and organisational culture and goals helps to produce positive results (Baker, 2015; 2017). The alignment (Baker, 2015) of the mentoring scheme with NCT's context, and with the culture of learning and support, adds to theoretical knowledge around mentoring as it features a different kind of organisation with self-employed practitioners. It is not a standard workplace or third-sector organisation, as NCTPs are neither employees nor volunteers in their practitioner roles (although they may be either, or both, in other roles concurrently). The extension to Baker's (2015; 2017) work is because the alignment is not through HR policies and strategies, but through the education, training and development of NCTPs which strongly affiliates them to the organisation, and its aims and values. Baker's (2017) ideas can be related to Figures 5.1 and 4.1 with elements within the NCT context forming the vertical alignment, the relationships featured in both

representing the horizontal alignment, and the implementation through the features and processes of the scheme being shown in both figures. An appropriate mentoring scheme within a dispersed organisation can therefore reinforce existing organisational values and encourage connections. In this study, it also offers routes for development and career progress within NCT.

The study supports the argument that organisational culture can strengthen and sustain mentoring relationships, enabling more effective collaboration (Hegstad and Wentling, 2005; Merrick, 2017). Schein's (2004) model of organisational culture (cited in Buchanan and Huczynski, 2010) refers to three levels, the second of which being the values and beliefs within that organisation. For NCT, these include support for parents, the need for practitioners to develop, and the mutual support between practitioners. The outer layer of Schein's model, of artefacts and creations, is more difficult to apply to a dispersed organisation with no shared workplace; however, NCTPs share a language (e.g. 'birth' not 'delivery') and stories. The shared connections that contribute to this include experience or a specialism (de Janasz and Godshalk, 2013), a shared passion for practice (Ryan *et al.*, 2010), or a more personal aspect, such as having children (Cox, 2005b; Wanberg *et al.*, 2006).

Confidentiality, one of the fundamental shared values, was considered essential to trust building, supporting Wallace and Gravells (2007), and Leck and Orser (2013). Trust was partly dependent on shared values, supporting Striukova and Rayna's finding (2008), and on the presence of empathy (Hall and Kahn, 2002); its growth for mentors may depend on how much effort a mentee puts in (Young and Perrewé, 2000). The presence of respect seemed to be important in the development of trust, as argued by Stanulis and Russell (2000) and Finkelstein *et al.* (2012). It was difficult to tease out how much of the trust came from organisational sources and how much from personal interactions (Sousa-Lima *et al.*, 2013); however, the reinforcement of the shared values by practitioners within the mentoring scheme does seem to have made a significant contribution. This study challenges the idea that formal mentoring makes trust more difficult (Beirema and Merriam, 2002; Wanberg *et al.*, 2007; Buche, 2008; Finkelstein *et al.*, 2012), as this formal scheme engendered trust among its participants, facilitated by the shared 'NCT-ness', and more quickly than

Bouquillon *et al.'*s (2005) results of trust growing slowly in an educational context would suggest. As such, this study forms a contribution to the theoretical knowledge around mentoring. Given that trust develops differently within individual contexts (Kramer and Cook, 2007), this is also a contribution to literature around trust in organisations, as it shows the layers of trust created within a dispersed, third-sector, formal mentoring scheme (Figure 5.2).

The study also challenges the idea that formal mentors are less likely to offer psychosocial support (Smith, Howard and Harrington, 2005), as mentees typically perceived considerable support from mentors. The idea that mentoring needs affectionate bonds (Bouquillon *et al.*, 2005; Ghosh, 2014) is challenged as the intensity of relationships varied from "a necessary evil" to "amazing" without necessarily corresponding decreases in development or support perceived by mentees. English and Sutton's study (2000) suggested that working in the same organisation would be unlikely to enable the provision of safe spaces for mentoring. However, this study shows NCT can provide safe spaces, and indicates in this dispersed organisation, workplace mentoring is perceived as safe, supportive and developmental.

There is a paucity of discussion concerning dispersed organisations within current literature; one exception being Simmonds and Lupi (2010). However, virtual mentoring is investigated, largely through literature reviews (Bierema and Merriam, 2002) or conceptual articles (Colky and Young, 2006), though few (Thompson *et al.*, 2010) examine just one organisation. This study adds to understanding of dispersed organisations and how virtual methods of mentoring can be successful, by reinforcing existing organisational values and ties through connecting practitioners. As organisations become increasingly global and networked in character (Stanek, 2001; Matuszek *et al.*, 2008) and dispersed in nature, this knowledge is valuable.

6.4 The contribution to mentoring practice

The formation of the NCT scheme was in response to changing circumstances which necessitated a relatively swift formulation and implementation. This left no time for a pilot programme to examine how the

scheme functioned. For example, mentoring could have been timelier for some mentees, whereas others welcomed it but wished it to have been longer. Thus, flexibility around timing in new schemes, even when compulsory, would enable mentees to access mentoring when needed, which would increase developmental opportunities and enhance effectiveness. The idea that compulsory mentoring is less effective than voluntary mentoring is challenged by this study (Newby and Heide, 1992; Blake-Beard *et al.*, 2007; Eby, 2012). Although not all mentees in NCT's scheme had compulsory mentoring, most did, and mentoring can possibly be perceived as such even when not intended to be. However, this did not prevent mentoring being developmental for most mentees; the study thus offers evidence to support Allen *et al.* (2006a) in concluding voluntary participation does not raise quality, and supports Orland-Barak and Hasin (2010) who suggest that connections mitigate involuntary mentoring.

It is clear the culture of support within NCT as a dispersed organisation helps to generate trust to enable mentoring at a distance. It seems important that methods of contact are not prescribed, but are left up to dyads as personal choice seems to override any notion of what might be the most effective method. Knowledge around trust in formal mentoring has been added to by this study. Clearly trust can be engendered through organisational mechanisms, such as goodwill trust (Fineman *et al.*, 2010), in a dispersed organisation using virtual methods of contact. Trust can also develop with a sense of shared values, shared skills, being open about similar experiences (Elsbach, 2007) and other connections. Organisations could enhance shared values between mentoring dyads and promote their shared skills and experiences so that connections can be emphasised. Trust is also linked in this study to payment, as the separate and recognised role of mentor enabled trust to be formed.

Paying mentors as an additional role also valued their contribution to the organisation, and professionalised them as mentors. Consequently, payment for mentoring is a viable option, supporting work done by Terrion and Leonard (2010) and Cooper *et al.* (2014). It also showed mentees they were valued, reducing their frustration and (mostly) any sense of being a burden, as protected time allowed mentoring to take place. Limited time is considered to be an issue within mentoring relationships (Mills *et al.*, 2008) but here there were mixed views around time with at least some mentees

or mentors seeing the limited time as at least neutral. Evidence from this study supports the idea that short time periods can be effective in a mentoring relationship (Single *et al.*, 2005; Kasprisin *et al.*, 2008; Kadivar, 2010; Hennissen *et al.*, 2011; Eby, 2012) and agrees that simply providing extra time does not ensure enhancement for mentoring dyads (Locasale-Crouch *et al.*, 2012). In some instances time-limits were a positive factor as they kept the dyad focused, and did not impose burdens on either mentees or mentors. Mentees tended to be time-poor due to their complex lives with children, other jobs and volunteering roles within NCT. Mentees and mentors used strategies to make the most of time, which could be seen as adding to practical knowledge to maximise time. Using time efficiently also depended somewhat on connections being made between mentees and mentors to enable relationships to be built quickly, although this was a source of tension as making connections uses time.

6.5 Recommendations

For practice

Formal mentoring schemes need to be carefully resourced, so that mentors can be supported and mentees can be prepared effectively, as an under-resourced scheme is less likely to succeed. This means at least a coordinator for the scheme, with adequate time for the role. Organisations contemplating introducing formal schemes need to be certain that adequate resources and organisational support can be committed. It is recommended that organisations consider payment, or other rewards enabling the delineation of separate time to fulfil the mentor role and to protect time for mentoring so that mentors are not overloaded. Paying mentors facilitates successful mentoring experiences within NCT: having a separate role of mentor proves to be a positive factor, adding career opportunities for senior practitioners, and professionalising the role of mentor. It also offers protected space and time for mentees. Time itself does not have to be unlimited in order to make use of mentoring so an organisation does not have to commit to paying unlimited amounts to mentors to facilitate this professional role. Mentees use strategies such as saving time until there is greater need, which can appear to mentors as lack of engagement, so mentoring dyads need to be very open and honest about their strategic use

of time. The strategies, and awareness of their risks, can be promoted by the organisation to ensure informed decision-making around the use of time. The element of timeliness in the current scheme would suggest that mentoring schemes could benefit from flexibility in terms of timing, so that rather than imposing mentoring on participants, it would be fruitful to consider when would be best for an individual to be mentored.

Mentoring schemes within organisations need to be aligned (Baker, 2015) to the organisational culture. Where the goals of a mentoring scheme are vertically aligned to the values of the organisation, the participants will be able to communicate with one another using shared language and thus create the horizontally aligned relationships required. Furthermore, the processes involved in the scheme can enable the implementation in line with the organisational values and the relationships created (Baker, 2017). In this way, participants in the scheme can see mentoring as a positive resource, even if at times it is approached from a deficit viewpoint. The recognition that both mentees and mentors can view mentoring from a deficit viewpoint, and mentees from a box-ticking perspective, suggests that it is imperative to be completely clear about the purposes of a formal mentoring scheme.

The enhancement of connections between mentees and mentors could be overt and deliberate, as a transparent way of enabling trust to develop. Some mentees benefited greatly from mentors sharing their specialism, while others were less concerned, which suggests that matching processes could be flexible. This is perhaps particularly relevant in virtual mentoring, where relationships may need to be built quickly (Colky and Young, 2006) on a basis of very little information. Media used could be selected within the dyad, but with full knowledge of the advantages and disadvantages (and of ameliorating factors) of all potential methods.

For further study

The complexity of Figure 5.2 suggests that the many factors contributing to the development of trust in this study could be examined further, as well as how trust itself develops throughout a mentoring relationship (Finkelstein *et al*., 2012). Sousa-Lima *et al.* (2013) refer to the difference between trust between co-workers and trust in the organisation itself, although they were

discussing employees, which may not apply to self-employed practitioners in a dispersed organisation. However, the current study may not have asked the right questions to establish whether 'NCT-ness' applies to their fellow practitioners or to the organisation, or to only parts of the organisation. Further study would be useful as it could add to literature on organisational trust, which is limited on dispersed organisations, frequently focusing on virtual teams (Henttonen and Blomqvist, 2005) rather than mentoring. The importance of trust and respect within mentoring is recognised, although how to enhance the development of trust and respect within training programmes may be under-researched. Garvey and Westlander (2016) suggest that there is a paucity of research on mentor training, so the way training has evolved while being guided by someone embedded within an organisation might be worthy of investigation.

Dyads in the current study used different methods of contact, including multiple media at times. It would be of interest to study their experiences of different media in more detail to consider if there were material differences to those experiences. This may help to provide information to guide future mentoring schemes towards ameliorating disadvantages (or best practice), which may increase in significance as dispersed organisations become more prevalent. The method of 'visual as prompt' (Woodhouse, 2012:21) still has potential within the mentoring field and could be explored further in future studies. This study has shown that even though the method was normal practice, it was not considered favourably by some participants. It therefore may need some exploration with participants to ascertain the best way to implement as a research method.

It would be useful to study mentoring dyads longitudinally (Gray *et al.*, 2016), in order to examine expectations at the beginning of the relationship, processes throughout and outcomes at the end. It could also be valuable to follow mentees up in a number of years to see if developmental changes had been long-term and lasting. How to separate out effects from one intervention (i.e. mentoring) from the natural development taking place in practitioners would be an interesting theoretical exploration before any longitudinal studies were undertaken.

6.6 Limitations of the thesis

As with all research, there are methodological and practical limitations to the study although they do not detract from the contributions made. Working from an interpretive ontology (Crotty, 1998) means I have interpreted information shared with me by participants and found in supporting documentation. Using a case study approach has limited the findings to one organisation, which has potentially unique characteristics of being dispersed, of having a culture of support and learning, and where most practitioners share a set of values of working for the common good, of confidentiality and of a passion for the work area. This has, however, enabled a focus on the case, which may be a strength. I am an insider-researcher (Chavez, 2008), which means I have had to be extremely careful of a bias towards the NCT mentoring scheme, particularly as the scheme was developed in my role as mentor tutor and coordinator. This is explored further in section 6.7.

This study may not have enquired enough into participants' views of the intended purposes of the mentoring scheme. Asking mentees and mentors what they considered the focus to be could have been revealing, as they may have considered the focus to be different to what was intended. It would have been useful to find a way to speak to all existing and past mentees, rather than relying on volunteers, as this would give a more complete picture and included the missing voices. It would be useful to ascertain the perspectives of participants in schemes so that approaches can be tailored to ensure mentoring met participant needs rather than assuming the presence of positive attitudes. These all could be useful future extensions to the current study.

Much of the literature around mentoring, or from related disciplines, studies employees. Self-employed workers may have a different relationship with the organisation or with colleagues. Many of the original process or planning documents for the mentoring scheme were written in my roles as mentor tutor and coordinator, although all of them were scrutinised by others. These included the tutor team who planned the new programme, my own work-team (Quality and Support Team), my line manager (the Quality and Competencies Manager), and the team of mentors. Revisiting

documentation in the light of participant experiences of the scheme was enlightening however, after some years' distance from them.

The success of using images within interviews as 'visual as prompt' (Woodhouse, 2012:21) varied, which was surprising given its use within NCT. Some participants selected and spoke about many images, so it was clear they had been useful in aiding reflections. However, one or two commented that they hated this method, and did not engage with it whole-heartedly during interviews.

There are several practical limitations. While all current and prior mentees and mentors were invited to speak I was only able to complete twenty-four interviews (plus two pilot interviews). This means my respondents may not be representative of mentees and mentors within NCT. It may be that those interviewed wanted to share positive experiences; however participants did identify reservations and issues, which suggests a range of views were heard.

It is possible that participants gave the responses to questions they felt were correct, or that I wanted to hear, instead of their truths. They were mostly speaking from memory rather than giving contemporaneous accounts. Participants were from different cohorts of mentees, and mentors had different training experiences as the scheme developed over time. The study was a snapshot of their experiences rather than a longitudinal study. It is also possible my inexperience at interviewing, and my sense of them as volunteers in the study, may not have led them to explore their experiences effectively.

NCT underwent changes in education programmes and other aspects including a new HoEP, new CEO and Executive Team throughout the time of the mentoring scheme, including some during the study period. This may have affected participant experiences. It is possible that my emphasis on the Education and Practice Department may not have been shared by participants in their reactions to the idea of 'NCT-ness' which may have affected my interpretations.

There were inherent challenges from the beginning with this study. A long-term health condition made it difficult accessing the university, and to study at all, particularly in synthesising results. Travelling to interviews was physically, temporally and financially challenging. Support from supervisors and lecturers, and from my student cohort, has been invaluable in maintaining efforts and focus.

The exploration of the experiences of mentoring by interviewing participants around their experiences of mentees and mentors was the most enjoyable aspect of the study. Finding some interview venues was challenging; it was inconvenient to visit some participants' homes so we used cafés, which were noisy; I found transcribing these recordings difficult. The review of the supporting documentation offered opportunities for reflection on my role within NCT. It has been frustrating to ignore many other interesting aspects to the findings while prioritising findings that would answer the research question.

I had to recognise that I felt protective of the mentoring scheme, as it was my 'baby' within NCT. I had to ensure any defensiveness did not impede my ability to be research-oriented. My Director of Studies highlighted 'over-identification' (Chavez, 2008:479) emerging in my language when I spoke about being 'thankful' for few mentees having poor experiences. I recognised the concept I later termed 'NCT-ness' arising in a pilot interview had surfaced a major assumption on my part. I too believed that NCT mentors, as EPs and then mentors, would be particularly skilled. It was necessary then to try to be more dispassionate around mentors, although this was hard as I had trained each mentor and coordinated their mentoring work.

One difficulty was in maintaining my researcher's role, rather than allowing my NCT roles to take over in interviews. I mostly achieved this by undertaking reflective writing on the way to an interview to explore any existing relationship with each participant. There were times when I had an 'identification dilemma' (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007:70) about which role I represented, which caused amusement for some participants. It was useful to others as they asked for clarification around mentoring going forwards.

Some found it valuable to offer feedback to the coordinator as someone in a position to use it positively.

One participant spoke about images she liked, rather than any reflections being stimulated by them, which meant I had to interrupt to bring her back onto task. That made the power balance in the interview feel difficult to me, although she seemed happy to continue. On reflection, I was generally too reluctant to ask deeply-probing questions and develop thoughts further from the images, as I did not want to interrupt participants' trains of thought. This may have kept the method from achieving its full potential.

6.8 Conclusion

The study has added to mentoring theory and practice by showing that, despite expectations from literature, formal, virtual, paid-for and time-bound mentoring that is sometimes compulsory in a dispersed organisation, can be developmental both professionally and personally. This appears to be due to alignment (Baker, 2015; 2017) between the features of the scheme and the context of an organisation with a culture of support and value of learning, with a scheme planned by someone with an in-depth knowledge of the organisation. The culture is captured as 'NCT-ness' comprising shared values, shared skills and organisational trust, plus personal connections between practitioners. Baker's work (2017) is extended by the application into a different kind of organisation, namely a dispersed third-sector one with self-employed practitioners. Also, the study has added to literature around organisational trust, and trust in formal mentoring. The study has met the need for further research suggested in literature (Sosik *et al.*, 2005; Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007; Clutterbuck, 2010; Terrion and Leonard, 2010; Chandler *et al.*, 2011; Hamlin and Sage, 2011; Baker, 2017; Irby *et al.*, 2017). It adds to literature (Lejonberg *et al.*, 2015) around developmental mentoring by extending the definition to include more transactional features of a developmental relationship.

Due to the unique nature of NCT, findings may not be transferable to other organisations, but recognition of the value of payment and of limited time-

frames for mentoring may help to support mentoring in organisations where formal, compulsory mentoring is featured.

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Appendix 1: Background context to NCT

NCT is a third-sector organisation that aims to support parents. This support takes many forms but the focus of practitioners is on providing education and services. Practitioners are not employees, but rather members who have trained and studied to earn external qualifications and an internal Licence to Practise as an NCTP. Parents pay NCT centrally in order to access courses or some services (breastfeeding support is free), while practitioners claim a fee from their local PSA (administrative area) for work they carry out.

There is a focus on quality training and support for the work that NCTPs do (NCT, 2012b) and the development they undertake to support parents. NCTPs are working with people at vulnerable times in their lives as they prepare for birth, have babies, and experience early parenthood. Sometimes people are prepared to be open and share things they would not share in any other context. Occasionally tragic things do happen; it has been known for babies to be stillborn, or to die in early infanthood, or parents to die around the time of transition to parenthood. So, practitioners encounter strong feelings, highly emotional events, joyous occasions, and tragedies. They may be used as part of parental support networks, as emotional punch-bags for angry or distraught parents, or receive flowers and cards from grateful clients. The unpredictability of outcomes for parents means practitioners need to be prepared for, and cope with, almost anything. As well as being self-employed, NCTPs are part-time, usually having other jobs and children, and are thus time-poor, particularly while studying. It used to be a requirement to be mothers in order to enter NCT training, and although this is no longer the policy, all practitioners are women, and most are mothers. Many of them also volunteer for NCT by sitting on hospital committees as lay representatives, or fund-raising. Therefore NCTPs have complex and many-faceted lives, often with work-life balance issues.

NCTPs need to be trained, and supported in their professional development, to work well with parents, and have to complete a university level programme of education and training. Current modules include Giving Birth, Reflective Practice and Listening Skills, and New Baby – New Family (University of Worcester, 2017). As the programme has developed over time, it is difficult to offer an accurate overview of modules for all

practitioners, but all will have worked through a programme with the support of pastoral and academic tutors. To achieve practitioner status, the academic qualification plus practical facilitation assessments need to be passed.

Formal mentoring as facilitated by NCT is a visible phenomenon (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2007); but there is evidence among most mentors of informal mentoring of NQPs and students taking place in their local area. The formal scheme was not set up to replace informal mentoring, but to ensure that all NQ and probationary practitioners had equitable opportunities for their development to be supported. The HoEP (both original and current) felt supporting practitioners was crucial. The scheme was proposed as a module in the new course when NCT's university partner changed (timeline in Appendix 3). However it soon became clear that it needed to be an in-house programme, as remaining within a university course would have meant higher costs for student mentors. The Education and Practice Department was trusted to write a suitable programme (NCT, 2012c; 2016), as it had done previously. Similarly, I was trusted to develop appropriate training for the new role of mentor, and run the scheme aligned with NCT values (Baker, 2015). The timing of providing the mentoring scheme was partly pragmatic, as the new programme needed to be written. However, partly it coincided with my recently gained completion of a Master's degree, focusing on mentoring, so was able to take on the task of formulating the scheme. The scheme depends on the feasibility of virtual mentoring, particularly on email and Skype, which enables mentoring to be extended to practitioners isolated from their colleagues. So, factors came together to enable NCT's scheme to begin.

The mentoring scheme clearly has to be a virtual one as NCT is a dispersed organisation. However, it was not solely a pragmatic decision to work over distance; an element of strategic thinking was included. For example, mentors and mentees within the same administrative area (PSA) may not perceive the relationship as a safe place to bring local issues, which might have complicated local working relationships.

Currently there are several ways for practitioners to gain access to mentors (Appendix 3). These mainly involve either planned mentoring as part of a course i.e. probationary, or newly-qualified (NQ) practitioners, or mentoring

for a practitioner after encountering a difficult situation, usually at the suggestion of someone else, to support the NCTP. The difficult situation may involve a complaint, or a failed assessment, for example.

Mentees normally have action plans, whether they are from a tutor, an assessor, or self-developed. The overall aim is to enable and encourage professional development through mentoring, so that parents experience an excellent course or service from their NCTP. This, in turn, enhances their experience of pregnancy, birth, and early days of parenthood.

An NCT mentor has to achieve the gate-keeping status of 'Excellent Practitioner' (EP) before she can apply to be accepted for mentoring training, which is outlined below.

Learning outcomes of the mentoring training:
- Critically evaluate the theories and practices of mentoring, including the use of diverse media
- Evaluate the link between mentoring and learning and utilise strategies to enhance mentee learning.
- Apply their knowledge of the role to a variety of mentoring relationships
- Critically evaluate their role, responsibilities, and the learning that has taken place.

Process:

| Pre-course reflection: Experience of mentoring | Study day 1. Definitions and theories of mentoring. | Study day 2. Roles, boundaries, media, real-play. | Study day 3. Case studies, tools, practicalities. | Reading, reflection, discussion in teleconferences. | Mentoring relationship with volunteer. |

| Summative assignment: | Reflective report including: Preparation, self-evaluation of skills, critical analysis of media used, support, future practice as NCT mentor. | Criterion based grid: Written expression; Knowledge; Awareness of context; Issues; Self-evaluation; Reflection and future planning. |

The volunteer mentee is someone prepared to work with a mentor-in-training. The reflective report a student writes is double-marked by the mentor tutor and the Quality and Competencies Manager. Once an NCTP has her Licence to Practise as an NCT mentor, she is paid for that role over and above what she earns as a practitioner. This is standard practice for NCT; every role is remunerated separately.

Time is a crucial factor within NCT's mentoring scheme. As mentors are paid for mentoring work this obviously involves charges to the charity, and is limited to contain costs. So, for probationary mentees the time limit is two hours, for NQ practitioners (or volunteers for a mentor-in-training) it is three

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hours, and for mentees in post-difficult situations at least three hours. Anyone self-referring for mentoring sets their own time-limits. Although this is monitored through my coordinator role, it is not strictly policed. Thus, it is sometimes unclear how much time mentoring relationships have utilised.

At the scheme's inception, the Head of NCT's Education and Practice Department (HoEP) asked for an evaluative report after two years. The Mentoring Evaluation Report (D150817) took an overview of the history and processes involved in the mentoring scheme. It also examined forty-six evaluation forms from mentees. Further evaluation forms were collated in 2017 (D170314). A timeline of the introduction of mentoring into NCT is in Appendix 2.

Appendix 2: Timeline

Date	Personal involvement	NCT decisions and actions	Number of mentors
2006-2009	MA in Professional Development (Higher Education Practice); dissertation on 'Mentoring NQTs within NCT.'		
2012		Decision made to move to work with new partner (University of Worcester) (UW); new education programme needed	
31.1.12	Volunteered to develop mentoring module as part of new programme	Initially planned 'Supervision and Mentoring' as one of new Level 6 modules	
Jan-Feb 2012	First draft of new module, using UW specifications	Decided to move mentoring to Level 5	
Mar-12	Planning for first cohort of trainee mentors begins – intended for September 2012, with September 2013 roll out of mentoring	Decision made to move mentoring to 'in-house' module due to costs associated with doing it as UW course	
May-12	First draft of plan written for training		
Jun-12		Letter sent to all EPs to invite onto training module	
Aug-12		Job description written for Mentoring Coordinator.	
24.11.12	First study day facilitated	Training for first cohort begins	
22.01.13	Led discussion around definition	NCT definition and mission statement for mentoring agreed and published within NCT	
12.2.13	Organised volunteer mentees for training mentors	First training mentoring relationships began with voluntary mentees	
May-13	Facilitated training	Second cohort of mentors began training	
Jul-13	Matched first mentee to training mentor – with knowledge of unqualified status	First post-assessment mentee in programme	
Sep-13	Marked assignments and awarded Licence to Practise as NCT mentors to first cohort	First mentors qualified; first probationary mentees	5
Sep-13	Enter first year of MA at OBU		
Jan-14	Facilitated training	Third cohort of student mentors began training	
Mar-14		First post-complaint mentees; second cohort qualify	Another 5 (10)
Sep-14	Enter DCaM at OBU		
Oct-14	Facilitated training	Fourth cohort of mentors began training	

Oct-14	Facilitated training	Fourth cohort of mentors began training	
Dec-14	Awarded PGC in Coaching and Mentoring from OBU	Third cohort qualify	Another 4 (14)
Jan-15		First 'pre-crisis' mentee	
Feb-15		First 'other' mentee (e.g. health reasons)	
Aug-15	Researched and wrote evaluation of first two years of mentoring	Official evaluation report submitted to Head of Education, NCT College and NCT management	
Aug-15		First NQPs in the programme	Another 1 (15)
Apr-16		First privately-funded mentee; new Head of Education	One left (14)
Sep-16	Facilitated training	Fifth cohort of mentors began training	
Mar-17	Facilitated training; collated previous 18 months of evaluation forms.	Sixth cohort of mentors began training	
May-17		First 'post-reunion' mentee	
Summer 2017			Two left (12) - 9 training

Appendix 3: Mentoring in the NCT context

Mentoring in the NCT context.

Definition:

Mentoring in the NCT context is a confidential, 1:1 strategy to assist with the professional development of an individual; helping them to learn, to reflect and to become more effective in what they do; and working towards the identification and nurturing of potential.

This process may be:-

a) Routinely contained within a programme of study, either as a probationer or as a newly-qualified practitioner (NQP);

b) At the practitioner's own request, perhaps to help through a period of challenge or transition for the individual, which sometimes involves working with a mentor-in-training;

c) To prepare for transitions or gate-keeping (e.g. an assessment, career development or progression), this may be at the request of the practitioner, or at the suggestion of an assessor, tutor or a senior manager within NCT College;

d) At the suggestion of an assessor, tutor or a senior manager within NCT College in order to support the individual effectively. This may be after a complaint from a member of a course they facilitated, after a challenging or failed assessment, or in recognition of accumulating causes of concern.

Mission statement:

NCT believes that mentoring is an integral part of the supportive network that practitioners can access as and when needed in order to help them develop, or deal with a professional challenge or a transition. Mentors believe in the self-efficacy of individuals, that they all seek to reflect upon and develop themselves and their work; and that mentors can assist and support while practitioners undergo processes of reflection and development.

Cathy Evans – Mentoring Co-ordinator.
22nd January 2013.

These schedules show the questions in their final form.

For mentees.

Key: **Q** = question for mentee; **S** = source of question; **A** = adaptations (if any).

Preamble: I stressed confidentiality; not a way of checking up on the work of their mentor; I was wearing researcher 'hat' not other 'hats'. Also, what purpose of interview was, and what my plan for interview was. Asked if there were any questions, we could break or stop at any point. 'Briefing the interviewee' (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:154). 'Hats' - to be explicit about roles being held by an insider-researcher (Greene, 2014:6).

Q1.	**Please tell me a little bit about how you got to be where you are today in NCT.**
S	Gillham, 2005:31
A	Brought in after pilot interviews. To reproduce feeling of knowing.
Q1a.	**What brought you to volunteer for this study – what was your thinking there?**
S	Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:154
A	Brought in after pilot interviews.
Q2.	**What were your experiences of mentoring before the NCT scheme?**
S	Hall *et al.*, 2008; Larose 2013
A	First planned question
Q3.	**a) What were your perceptions of mentoring before the NCT scheme began?** **b) Have these been altered by NCT mentoring?** **c) Why do you perceive you were in the NCT mentoring scheme?**
S	To find out what perceptions held
A	Originally just question a)
Q4.	**a) What stands out for you about how the actual programme was structured?** **b) Did any of the features influence the mentoring relationship? e.g. Did the time limit, the virtual nature, or the fact that the mentor was paid affect it?** **c) Did the fact the mentor was an EP make any difference?**
S	Mills *et al.* 2008; Wanberg *et al.*, 2003:105; Long *et al.*, 2012:18, Gerstein, Wilkeson and Anderson, 2004:174; Kasprisin *et al.*, 2008:165.
A	Originally '**How did the design of the programme influence the relationship (e.g. pay, limited time, method of contacting them)?'** Realised to be a leading question, added in about status of the mentor (i.e. as EP) after first few interviews. Hale, 2000.
Q5.	**What were your expectations of your work with an NCT**

		mentor?
S		Similar to Q3, I felt expectations could affect perceptions.
A		Changed order after 4th interview – this became 5th question.
Q6.		**a) Did you feel it was important to get to know your mentor?** **b) Did you consciously try to build a relationship?** **c) How easy was it to get to know her?**
S		Garvey and Alred, 2000; Brechtel, 2003; Headlam-Wells, 2004; Ragins, 2012
A		Added in a) and b) after pilot interviews
Q7.		**Tell me about the relationship with your mentor. Has it been supportive? Has it been challenging?**
S		English and Sutton, 2000; Hale, 2000; Hay, 2000; Harrison *et al*. 2006; Daloz, 2012
A		Added in after 9th interview to extend question 6
Q8.		**Did you feel there was any trust and respect between you and the mentor?** **What a) helped and b) hindered in the development of trust and respect?** After pilot interviews added **'Is there anything about it being an <u>NCT</u> mentor that led to trust? Anything intrinsic? People have spoken about 'NCT-ness' – does that chime with your experience?**
S		Gardiner, 1998; Alred and Garvey, 2000; Beirema and Merriam, 2002; Hall and Kahn, 2002; Hudson, 2016. 'NCT-ness' from first pilot interview (e.g. Bouquillon *et al.*, 2005).
A		Changed from 'What helped or hindered the development of trust and respect between you and the mentor?'
Q8.		**a) What impact did the mentoring have on your work as a practitioner?** **b) Has it influenced anything else?**
S		Ragins and Verbos, 2007; Clutterbuck, 2008; Orland-Barak and Hasin, 2010; Haggard *et al.*, 2011; Eby 2012
Q10.		**What does mentoring mean to you at the moment?**
S		To elicit affective thoughts, but often elicited cognitive
Q11.		**Would you be involved in the mentoring scheme in the future as a mentee / mentor?**
S		Rollins *et al.*, 2014; Weese *et al.*, 2014. Did participants view mentoring through developmental or deficiency lens?
Q12.		**Would you do anything differently if you had the time again / another time?**
S		The second pilot interviewee suggested this as a question
Q13.		**Would you offer any advice to a) future mentors and to b) future mentees?**
S		One of supervisory team suggested this question
Q14.		**Please now look at these images and see if anything comes to mind about your experiences in the NCT mentoring scheme.**
S		Harper, 2002; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004

Q15.	Do you have anything to add?
Q16.	Do you feel there is anything else I should have asked you about?
Q17.	How has that been for you? Was that ok?
S	Jacob and Ferguson, 2012; Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015
Q18.	Did my other role as mentor coordinator affect the way you responded? Did it feel safe to be honest and open?
S	Greene, 2014:6

Post-interview: I thanked participant for her time and for being willing to take part, offered to send transcript and executive summary if wanted, checked that I was alright to follow up.

For mentors.

Key: **Q** = question for mentor; **S** = source of question; **A** = adaptations (if any).

Preamble: after signing consent form, and prior to asking questions, preamble stressed confidentiality, not checking up on their work as mentors; I was wearing researcher 'hat' today, not other 'hats'. Otherwise, as above.

Q1.	Please tell me a little bit about how you got to be where you are today in NCT.
S	Gillham, 2005:31
A	Brought in after pilot interviews. To enhance our existing relationship.
Q1a.	What brought you to volunteer for this study – what was your thinking there?
S	Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:154
A	Brought in after pilot interviews
Q2.	What were your experiences of mentoring before the NCT scheme?
S	Hall *et al.*, 2008; Larose 2013
Q2a.	What drew you to become a mentor for NCT?
S	Eby and Lockwood, 2005; Colky and Young, 2006
Q3.	a) What were your perceptions of mentoring before you trained as an NCT mentor? b) Did they change after training? c) After working as an NCT mentor?
S	To find out what perceptions held
Q4.	a) What to you are the key organisational / structural aspects of the NCT programme? b) Did these influence a mentoring relationship? c) Does being an EP make any difference?
S	Mills *et al.* 2008; Wanberg, Welsh and Hezlett, 2003:105; Long *et al.*, 2012:18, Gerstein, Wilkeson and Anderson, 2004:174; Kasprisin

	et al., 2008:165
A	'**How did the design of the programme influence the relationship (e.g. pay, limited time, method of contacting them)?'** realised to be leading question and became as above after the first few interviews. I added in about EP status after the first few interviews. Hale, 2000. Moved to question 4 position after the first few interviews.
Q5	**How do you see your role? Is it the same or different with different mentees?**
S	Allen, 2003
A	Added re balance **support versus challenge**. English and Sutton, 2000; Hale, 2000; Hay, 2000; Harrison *et al*. 2006; Daloz, 2012
Q6.	**a) Did you feel it was important to get to know your mentees?** **b) Did you consciously try to build relationships?** **c) How easy was it to get to know her / them?**
S	Garvey and Alred, 2000; Brechtel, 2003; Headlam-Wells, 2004; Ragins, 2012
A	Added parts a) and b) after second pilot interview, as original question (part c) assumed they did get to know their mentee, and they wanted to.
Q7.	**Tell me about your relationships with your mentees – perhaps selecting one or two at this point. How did they develop?**
Q8.	**Did you feel there was any trust and respect between you and the mentee**? **What a) helped and b) hindered in the development of trust and respect?** After pilot interview added **'Is there anything about being an NCT mentor that led to trust? Anything intrinsic? People have spoken about 'NCT-ness' – does that chime with your experience?'**
S	Gardiner,1998; Alred and Garvey, 2000; Beirema and Merriam, 2002; Hall and Kahn, 2002; Hudson, 2016. 'NCT-ness' from first pilot interview (supported by e.g. Bouquillon *et al.*, 2005).
A	Changed from 'What helped or hindered the development of trust and respect between you and the mentor?'
Q9	**a) What impact has the mentoring you have done had on your practice as a mentor?** **b) And also as a practitioner?** **c) Has it influenced anything else?**
S	Ragins and Verbos, 2007; Clutterbuck, 2008; Orland-Barak and Hasin, 2010; Haggard *et al.*, 2011; Eby 2012
Q10.	**What does mentoring mean to you at the moment?**
S	To elicit affective thoughts, but often elicited cognitive.
Q11.	**Would you be involved in the mentoring scheme in the future as a mentee / mentor?**
S	Rollins *et al.*, 2014; Weese *et al.*, 2014). Did participants view mentoring through developmental or deficiency lens?

Q12.	**Would you do anything differently if you had the time again / another time?**
S	Second pilot interviewee suggested this.
Q13.	**Would you offer any advice to a) future mentors and to b) future mentees?**
S	One of supervisory team suggested this question
Q14.	**Please now look at these images and see if anything comes to mind about your experiences in the NCT mentoring scheme.**
S	Harper, 2002; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004
Q15.	**Do you have anything to add?**
Q16.	**Do you feel there is anything else I should have asked you about?**
Q17.	**How has that been for you? Was that ok?**
S	Jacob and Ferguson, 2012; Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015
Q18.	**Did my other role as mentor coordinator affect the way you responded? Did it feel safe to be honest and open?**
S	Greene, 2014:6

Post-interview: I thanked participant for her time and for being willing to take part, offered to send transcript and executive summary if wanted, checked that I was alright to follow up.

Appendix 5: List of documents found re mentoring in NCT

Initial date	Title; number of pages	Source; author
List of documents found re mentoring in NCT.		
120128a. 1	Overall Deadlines_NCT Development Team Meetings; 3pp	Development for new programme (DNP); Dr Clea Harmer (CH) as Head of Education
120128b. 2	Overall NCT Development Team Meetings; 2pp	DNP; CH
120217. 3	Notes from L6 teleconference; 3pp	DNP; Cathy Evans (CE) as mentoring module developer
120221. 4	Notes for Supervision _Mentoring module L6; 4pp	DNP; CE
120227. 5	Possible Career Pathways_L6; 1p	DNP; CH
120229a. 6	Meeting of All Development Teams; 6pp	DNP; CH
120229b. 7	Module Specification Mentoring; 2pp	CE
120321. 8	Notes from Development Meeting; 8pp	DNP; CH
120421. 9	Plan for mentoring module; 1p	Emails CH CE
120423. 10	Tutors' update April; 4pp	DNP; CH
120522a. 11	Mentoring – course outline; 5pp	CE
120522b. 12	Proposal document mentoring; 3pp	CE
120619. 13	Letter to EPs; 2pp	CE
120730. 14	Email – one question; 1p	CE; CH
120802. 15	Email to all Excellent Practitioners; 2pp	CE
120820. 16	Mentoring Job Description; 3pp	HR department
120900. 17	NCT Achievements; 16pp	NCT publicity
120918a. 18	CMC Agenda; 2pp	Course Management committee (CMC); CH
120918b. 19	CMC minutes; 4pp	CMC; CH
121222. 20	NCT definition of mentoring discussion; 3pp	CE and mentoring students
130109a. 21	SIP Agenda; 3pp	Supporting Individual Practitioners committee (SIP); administrative support
130109b. 22	Notes from SIP meeting; 16pp	SIP; administrative support staff
130122. 23	Definition_mission statement NCT mentoring; 1p	CE (with input from mentoring students and CH)
130123. 24	Notes from SIP meeting; 9pp	SIP; administrative support staff
130626a. 25	SIP Agenda; 2pp	SIP; administrative support staff

| 130626b. 26	Minutes SIP; 8pp	SIP; administrative support staff
130702. 27	Establishment of NCT College v3; 11pp	Head of Education; CH
130730. 28	Mentor coordinator job description final; 4pp	HR department
130923a. 29	SIP Agenda; 1p	SIP; CH
130923b. 30	SIP Minutes; 12pp	SIP; administrative support staff
130924. 31	Flow chart showing mentoring processes; 2pp	CE
131001. 32	NCT Mentors' CPD_maintaining L to P; 2pp	CE
131007. 33	NCT mentoring code of ethics; 2pp	CE; adapted from EMCC website
131017. 34	NCT College Report 2012-2013; 29pp	CH for NCT College
131114. 35	NCT mentors; 2pp	CE
131128a. 36	Practice Meeting Agenda; 2pp	Practice area; CH
131128b. 37	Practice Meeting minutes; 4pp	Practice area; administrative support staff
140207. 38	Assessor_supervisor_mentor_EP role summary; 17pp	College Operations Manager; Practice Manager Becky Stephens (BS)
140211. 39	Timeline – BBPP [Probationary Practitioners]; 2pp	Practice Manager; BS
140212a. 40	SIP Agenda; 1p	SIP; CH
140212b. 41	SIP Minutes; 3pp	SIP; administrative staff
140325. 42	Mentoring report March 14; 1p	CE
140520. 43	Support pathways; 1p	SIP; CE as mentoring coordinator
140612. 44	Process for Practitioner-funded mentoring; 1p	CE
140801. 45	Objectives of NCT mentoring scheme; 2pp	CE
140814a. 46	Mentor schedule of work; 2pp	CE; for SIP
140814b. 47	Mentoring annual report 2013-14; 2pp	CE
140829. 48	Annual Evaluation Report mentors; 4pp	SIP; CE
140923. 49	Support pathways table; 1p	SIP; CE
141001. 50	Accessing Support_Practitioners; 2pp	Practice manager
141208. 51	NCT College Annual Report; 43pp	CH for NCT College
141219. 52	Emails (purpose of mentoring); 1p	CE CH

150120a. 53	SIP call notes; 1p	CE; for SIP
150120b. 54	Psychological Distances paper (discussion); 2pp	CE; to discuss with SIP
150128. 55	SIP meeting notes; 4pp	Admin staff for SIP
150129. 56	Senior practitioner communication; 8pp	SIP
150203. 57	PDM for Senior practitioners; 2pp	CE for SIP, SP and SP comms
150311. 58	Proposal for supervisor_mentor agreements; 1p	SIP; CE and Ann Parker Supervision coordinator (AP)
150329. 59	Mentor schedule of work; 2pp	CE; for SIP
150428. 60	BB Probationary Checklist CE; 3pp	Practice area; RS
150713. 61	Mentor report 2014-15; 6pp	CE; for SIP
150817. 62	Mentoring evaluation final; 16pp	CE
151013. 63	Aims of scheme and course; 5pp	CE
151211. 64	Holistic CPD policy_application; 6pp	RS (Practice Manager for NCT)
151214. 65	NCT College Annual Report; 54pp	CH for NCT College
160302. 66	SIP minutes; 3pp	SIP; CH and admin team
160315a. 67	QAT Meeting Minutes; 1pp	Quality Assurance Team
160315b. 68	Anonymised evaluation form_mentoring; 2pp	Anonymous mentee; taken to QaS by CE.
160317. 69	Mentoring support for NCT practitioners; 3pp	CE
160329. 70	QAS Minutes; 1p	Quality and Support
160511. 71	Letter to pre-probationers; 2pp	CE and mentors
160628. 72	How to get the most from your mentor June 2016; 2pp	CE and mentors
160702. 73	NCT Mentoring Scheme agreement_probationers Spring	CE and mentors
160727. 74	Request for mentoring assessors_quality; 2pp	CE
160802. 75	Psychological Distances updated; 2pp	CE
160906. 76	NCT ethos (powerpoint from Induction); 1p	Tutors AH/LM
160919. 77	Annual Evaluation Report mentors; 4pp	CE and mentors
161212. 78	Email trail between mentee-name and CE; 3pp	Mentee-name and CE
170223. 79	Notes of discussion between mentors and CE; 3pp	CE and mentors

170314. 80	Mentoring Evaluation Report 2; 14pp	CE and mentees
170621. 81	Email from mentee to mentor; 1pp	Mentee to mentor
170719. 82	Current NCT organisational chart; 23pp	NCT's intranet; HR
Total 448 pages.		

Appendix 6: Examples of coding

First level coding – written on transcripts:

- Descriptive wording – using / adapting words participants used.
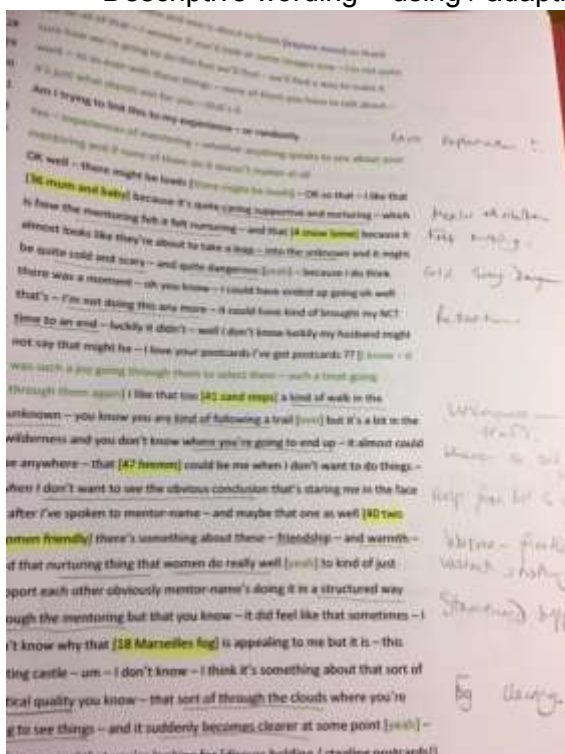
Second level coding – into NVivo with 79 nodes:

- Example: Early code of 'Development' became
  - 'Mentee development'
  - 'Mentor development'
  - 'Development' [in theory, in planning documents etc.]
  - 'Mentee benefit' [so not quite showing development]
  - 'Mentor benefit' [as above]
  - 'Organisational benefits'

Third level coding – grouping nodes into 11 areas:

- Why mentor?
- Advance factors affecting success or otherwise of the mentoring relationship
- Factors affecting mentoring as it was proceeding
- NCT aspects, processes, organisational benefits
- Not face-to-face
- Related to deficit model
- Why mentoring worked?
- Outcomes – wanted and actual
- Negative outcomes
- Relating to how the study was done

- Future thoughts?

Theme selection – six themes originally chosen:

- Evidence of development – both mentees and mentors
- Importance of connections between mentee and mentor
- 'NCT-ness'
- Trust and respect
- Support
- Time – linked to formality, distance, virtual, paid

Theme organisation – grouped into overarching themes:

- Context
   - Culture

   - Support

         - Support by mentors

    - 'NCT-ness'

         - Shared values

         - Shared skills

         - Organisational trust

      - Dispersed organisation

- Process
   - Rewards
   - Time
   - Formality
      - Compulsory
      - Matching
   - Rewards

- Relationships
   - Shared connections
      - Specialisms
   - Trust and respect

- Development
   - Evidence of development
   - Preparation for mentoring
   - Mentee disposition
   - Deficit approach
   - Mentors and development

Appendix 7: Word-clouds

What did you expect from mentoring?

Was mentoring useful?

Appendix 8: NCT organisational charts Summer 2017
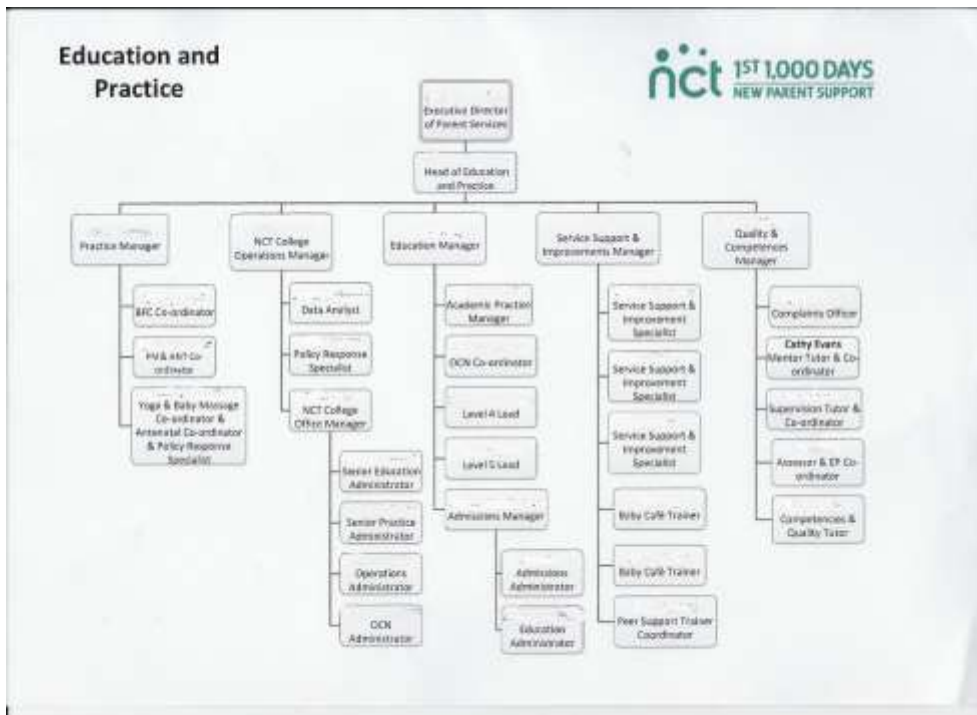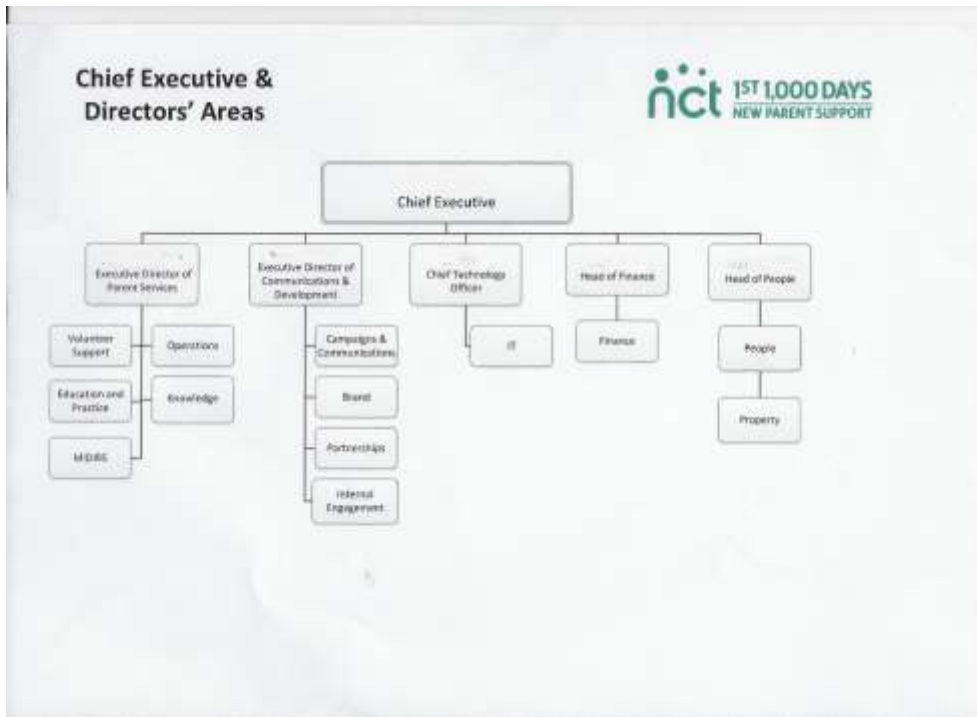
<u>Appendix 9: Images used</u>

Images have been removed from this online version due to copyright issues. For any queries please contact the author at cathy.ev9@gmail.com