Educational Psychologists’ views of factors that influence job approbation, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction when working within multi-agency local authority contexts

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# Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ............................................................................. 12
  1.1 Research context and rationale ............................................................... 12
  1.2 Aims and objectives of the research ...................................................... 14

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ......................................................... 15
  2.1 INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 15
    2.1.1 Definition of terms ............................................................................. 16
    2.1.2 Search strategy ................................................................................. 17
  2.2 THE RATIONALE FOR PREVIOUS RESEARCH ........................................ 17
  2.3 THEORIES OF JOB SATISFACTION .......................................................... 19
    2.3.1 Affect Theory ................................................................................... 19
    2.3.2 Motivation-hygiene theory ............................................................... 20
    2.3.3 Core Self-evaluation Model ............................................................... 21
  2.4 JOB SATISFACTION .................................................................................. 21
  2.5 APPROBATION ......................................................................................... 24
  2.6 JOB DISSATISFACTION .......................................................................... 25
  2.7 ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE ..................................................................... 27
  2.8 THE EP PROFESSION AND CURRENT CONTEXT ..................................... 29
    2.8.1 The historical context ......................................................................... 30
    2.8.2 Role of the EP ................................................................................... 31
    2.8.3 Every Child Matters and the multi-agency agenda ......................... 31
    2.8.4 EPs as multi-agency professionals ................................................... 33
  2.9 EP SATISFACTION, DISSATISFACTION AND APPROBATION ............ 34
    2.9.1 Research most closely related to the current study ......................... 35
    2.9.2 What gives EPs job satisfaction ....................................................... 40
    2.9.3 What gives EPs job dissatisfaction .................................................. 42
    2.9.4 Summary .......................................................................................... 45
  2.10 RESEARCH QUESTIONS ........................................................................... 46

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS ............................................................................ 46
  3.1 Introduction ............................................................................................. 46
  3.2 Philosophical Considerations .................................................................. 47
    3.2.1 Ontological considerations ............................................................. 47
    3.2.2 Epistemological considerations ....................................................... 48
3.2.3 Axiological considerations ................................................................. 48
3.3 Theoretical framework .......................................................................... 49
  3.3.1 Theoretical approaches employed .................................................. 49
  3.3.2 Social Constructionism .................................................................... 49
  3.3.3 Person Centred Approach ................................................................. 50
  3.3.4 Core Conditions ................................................................................. 51
  3.3.5 Techniques associated with the Person Centred approach .............. 51
  3.3.6 Active Listening ................................................................................. 51
  3.3.7 Paraphrasing ....................................................................................... 52
  3.3.8 Cognitive dissonance ......................................................................... 52
  3.3.9 Trust your instincts ............................................................................. 52
  3.3.10 The use of silence ............................................................................. 53
3.4 Methodological framework ..................................................................... 53
  3.4.1 Qualitative method employed in this study ........................................ 54
  3.4.2 Focus Groups & Semi-structured Interviews ..................................... 54
  3.4.3 Thematic Analysis ............................................................................. 58
3.5 Research methods ................................................................................... 59
  3.5.1 Data collection contingencies ............................................................. 59
  3.5.2 Recruiting Local Authorities ............................................................... 60
  3.5.3 Recruiting Individuals ....................................................................... 61
  3.5.4 Participants ......................................................................................... 62
  3.5.5 Rationale for using combined methods ............................................ 63
  3.5.6 Pilot Study ......................................................................................... 63
  3.5.7 Generated Questions ......................................................................... 65
  3.5.8 Data collection arrangements ............................................................. 67
  3.5.9 Conducting the focus groups .............................................................. 68
  3.5.10 Conducting the interviews ............................................................... 69
3.6 Procedure ............................................................................................... 70
3.7 Trustworthiness and credibility ............................................................... 71
  3.7.1 Triangulation & member check ......................................................... 72
3.8 Analysis of data ...................................................................................... 73
  3.8.1 Transcription of interviews and focus group discussion .................. 73
  3.8.2 Correcting the initial transcript ......................................................... 74
3.8.3 Considerations in using Thematic Analysis .................................................. 74
3.8.4 Appropriateness for this study ...................................................................... 76
3.8.5 Inductive or Deductive .................................................................................. 76
3.8.6 Explicit or Interpretive ................................................................................... 78
3.8.7 Initial coding .................................................................................................. 78
3.8.8 Inductive and explicit .................................................................................... 78
3.8.9 Identifying themes for each data set ............................................................... 79
3.8.10 Generating initial themes ............................................................................ 79
3.8.11 Member check ............................................................................................ 81
3.8.12 The emergence of meta-themes .................................................................. 81
3.9 Ethical considerations and approvals ............................................................... 82

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS ................................................................................. 84
4.1 Introduction ...................................................................................................... 84
4.2 Approbation .................................................................................................... 86
  4.2.1 Who provides approbation? ......................................................................... 86
  4.2.2 Feedback received ....................................................................................... 91
  4.2.3 Relationships ............................................................................................. 93
4.3 Autonomy ......................................................................................................... 94
  4.3.1 Personal Organisation .................................................................................. 97
  4.3.2 Work/life Balance ....................................................................................... 98
  4.3.3 Who is the client? ....................................................................................... 101
  4.3.4 Personality .................................................................................................. 101
  4.3.5 Locus of Evaluation .................................................................................... 102
4.4 Job Dissatisfaction ........................................................................................... 104
  4.4.1 Frustrations ............................................................................................... 104
  4.4.3 Bureaucracy ............................................................................................. 109
  4.4.4 Resources ................................................................................................... 111
  4.4.5 Outcomes / outputs ................................................................................... 114
  4.4.6 Feeling Valued ........................................................................................... 117
  4.4.7 Encroachment of Others ........................................................................... 118
  4.4.8 Not Making a Difference .......................................................................... 119
  4.4.9 Lack of Recognition .................................................................................. 120
  4.4.10 Distributed Teams .................................................................................... 121
4.4.11 Stress and Anxiety ................................................................. 122
4.5 Job Satisfaction ........................................................................ 124
  4.5.1 Match ................................................................................. 127
  4.5.2 Making a Difference ............................................................ 128
  4.5.3 Being Part of a Team ............................................................ 129
  4.5.4 Relationships ...................................................................... 130
  4.5.5 Variety .................................................................................. 131
  4.5.6 Development ....................................................................... 132
  4.5.7 Comfort Zone ...................................................................... 134
  4.5.8 Process .................................................................................. 135
  4.5.9 Status ................................................................................... 136
4.6 Multi-agency working ............................................................... 137
  4.6.1 Co-located teams ................................................................. 138
  4.6.2 Multi-agency teams .............................................................. 139
  4.6.3 Always worked in Multi-Agency Ways .................................. 142
  4.6.4 Multi Agency relationships .................................................. 144
  4.6.5 Multi Agency working in the future ....................................... 145
  4.6.6 Professional Identity ............................................................. 146
4.7 Summary of results ................................................................... 148

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .......... 151
  5.1 Introduction ............................................................................. 151
  5.2 Research Question 1 ............................................................... 152
  5.3 Research Question 2 ............................................................... 158
  5.4 Research Question 3 ............................................................... 165
  5.5 Research Question 4 ............................................................... 168
  5.6 Study strengths ....................................................................... 173
  5.7 Study limitations ..................................................................... 174
  5.8 Implications for further research ............................................ 176
  5.9 Recommendations .................................................................. 177
  Conclusions .................................................................................. 180
REFERENCES ................................................................................. 181
APPENDICES .................................................................................. 198
Appendix A Recruitment letter to EPS managers ............................. 198
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>Focus group recruitment letter to EPs</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>Participant Information Sheet</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>Consent form</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E</td>
<td>Six phases of thematic analysis (Braun &amp; Clarke, 2006)</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F</td>
<td>15 point checklist of criteria for a good thematic analysis</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G</td>
<td>Focus group &amp; interview questions</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix H</td>
<td>Mind Map from a data collection session</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Word Count: 56,575
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1</td>
<td>Research Participants</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2</td>
<td>Data files and codes</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.1</td>
<td>Research methodology</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.2</td>
<td>Mindjet mindmap</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.1</td>
<td>Summary of themes</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

Background: Over the past decade Local Authority Educational Psychologists in England have been increasingly required to engage in multi-agency work. There has been limited research within the UK context looking at factors which facilitate or are barriers to EP job satisfaction and approbation. This qualitative study elicits Educational Psychologists’ views of factors that influence approbation, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction when working within this context.

Methods: 27 Main grade and senior Educational Psychologists working in the North West of England participated in a combination of focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews using a set of predefined questions. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed before being analysed using inductive, explicit thematic analysis.

Results: Five themes of approbation, autonomy, job satisfaction, job dissatisfaction and multi-agency working were identified as relevant to the study.

Conclusions: In-depth Educational Psychology interviews allowed examination of the factors related to approbation, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. This resulted in a number of implications and recommendations for future policy and practice.
Declaration

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research context and rationale

Most research has autobiographical roots. It is important for the researcher to understand and explain the background to their interest in the chosen topic. Prior to entering the profession the researcher had worked in a variety of professions and a diversity of roles. This includes working as a higher executive officer in the civil service, a self employed information technology (IT) consultant, newsagent, local authority residential social worker, national health service counsellor and prison service tutor delivering a cognitive behavioural programme. The degree to which the researcher experienced job satisfaction in each role varied widely. As the researcher’s experience in different roles increased, so did awareness that a mixture of intrinsic and extrinsic factors contributed to the levels of satisfaction experienced. The researcher has made a personal journey towards a more vocational profession. This has helped the researcher move from a one-dimensional belief that simply “helping others” would provide job satisfaction to an understanding that satisfaction with one’s job is a more complex issue. This growing awareness initially led to an interest in carrying out research in this area.

At the time of choosing the focus for research, the author was employed by a local authority as a trainee Educational and Child Psychologist. In the year prior to choosing a topic the researcher had worked on placement in a number of Local Authorities (LAs). This experience had been varied and as with previous experiences had provided satisfaction, challenge and frustrations. The researcher discussed job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation with qualified Educational Psychologists (EPs) while on placement. From this, it appeared that the range of tasks lead the majority of EPs to also experience satisfaction, challenge and frustration to varying degrees. This increased the researcher’s interest in the area and an aspiration to explore the topic further.

The researcher spent a number of years training and practising as a professional person centred counsellor. Prior to training, the researcher held a strong belief that scientific reason, quantitative research and the medical model were the only approaches for studying human behaviour that held any value.
The experiential training led to the development of a more critical stance and a new found appreciation of phenomenology and qualitative ways of accessing rich, personal data. However, this led to a dilemma in approaching the topic of job satisfaction as an area of research.

There appeared to be an inherent paradox at the centre of choosing a research topic. The researcher felt it was important to choose an area in which they were deeply interested and in which their motivation would be sustained. However, by its nature this is likely to be an area to which the researcher already has a close relationship and personal views. The difficulty for the researcher drawn to qualitative research is that they must be open to the process of careful listening, exploration, analysis and interpretation while maintaining a certain distance from the material and minimising any prejudgements. Objectivity is neither possible and in some senses desirable. However, it is essential that a finely balanced tension between being too close or too far from the material is continually negotiated. It was felt that an appreciation of this tension prior to commencing the study, helped enable the researcher to feel comfortable proposing a qualitative study of approbation, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction within the psychology profession they were joining.

This thesis was commissioned by the North West Local Authority (LA) for which the researcher worked three days per week. The Principal Educational Psychologist and senior management team wished to identify the key factors related to approbation and job satisfaction for Educational Psychologists (EPs). They were particularly interested in considering these factors within the context of changes being implemented in a developing Children’s Services comprising of professionals from a number of disciplines. As an Educational and Child Psychologist in Training it was also important for the researcher to have a thorough understanding of how research can be applied to professional psychological practice. The Health Professions Council (HPC) standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists (HPC, 2009, p.16) states that psychologists should “recognise the value of research to the critical evaluation of practice”, “be able to evaluate research” and “be aware of a range of research methodologies”. Therefore, it was considered appropriate to research an area that has a direct impact on educational psychology practice.
1.2 Aims and objectives of the research

This research project aims to identify the factors related to job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation for EPs. In England and Wales EPs work in a variety of capacities and engage in a wide range of functions, either as self-employed individuals or employees. However, in England and Wales, the term Educational Psychologist is used to denote psychologists who are predominantly employed by local authorities (LAs) (Squires & Farrell, 2007). A large proportion of EPs have been employed by LAs rather than schools due to a statutory requirement for EP advice when producing a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN). Therefore, the term EP will be used to refer only to EPs who are employees of a local authority. Given the multiplicity of working arrangements for EPs, the ways in which they gain approbation and job satisfaction are also likely to be varied. This research, therefore, focuses solely on identifying key factors influencing job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation for EPs working for LAs in a multi-agency context.

Most of the research related to the levels of job satisfaction of psychologists working in educational contexts originates from the United States (US). In the US, the term School Psychologist (SP) is used rather than EP. Therefore, in drawing on this literature these terms will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis. There are many similarities between US based SPs and UK based EPs. For instance both make use of similar models of consultation as part of their practice (Kelly, Woolfson & Boyle, 2008). However, most would agree that the context in which EPs in English and Welsh LAs work is significantly different to that of US based School Psychologists. For instance, in the US there are an increasing number of SPs employed full-time in a single school rather than simultaneously serving two or more schools (Worrell, Skaggs & Brown, 2006).

While the professions have much in common, organisational procedures, school practices and societal influences are not fully comparable. EPs working in England and Wales are organised through an assortment of bodies including the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP), the British Psychological Society (BPS) and most recently the Health Professions Council (HPC) with whom they must now be registered. These contextual changes provide strong
grounds for examining perceived facilitators and barriers to EP job satisfaction in the UK. Likewise the lack of literature examining change, growth, satisfaction and professional esteem for EPs in the UK (Kelly, Woolfson & Boyle, 2008) strengthens the justification for this study.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This literature review commences with a general consideration of the reasons why satisfaction with one’s job has been a well funded and popular area of research for a number of years. Following this a number of factors previously associated with general job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation are presented. Leading from this consideration is given to more specific research related to the EP profession. This includes reflecting on the research most closely related to the current study.

The current research was conducted at a time when the organisational context in which EPs work was in transition. It is therefore important that literature from organisational psychology is considered as part of the review. This is carried out with a particular emphasis on factors that have been identified with successful organisational change. Next the review considers the current context of the EP profession within England and Wales. Issues covered include the reconstruction of the profession, evidence-based practice and the present political and economic climate.

A particularly important area reviewed as part of this context is the role of multi-agency working. This is achieved by situating the profession within its historical background and considering ways in which EPs have engaged with the recent multi-agency agenda. An important element of this review is contemplating the differences between EPs and other professionals working in a LA context. Part of this process includes a review of the research that suggests that EPs make a distinctive contribution to society, local authorities and families and children.

The intention of this review is to provide a clear rationale for the current study. This is achieved by commencing with general research findings before
narrowing the focus to those studies most closely related to the current topic. By both critiquing these “closest matches” and considering the current context of EPs work, it is hoped that justification will be given for the research questions that will then be posed.

2.1.1 Definition of terms

Job satisfaction has been defined in a number of ways. For instance, Locke (1976) referred to a positive feeling that an individual has in response to evaluating their job. Cranny, Smith and Stone (1992) discussed an emotional reaction to an individual’s job and Brief (1998) simply referred to an attitude and approach towards a person’s job. However, it has been suggested that job satisfaction cannot simply be defined in terms of affective response or attitude (Illies, Fulmer, Spitzmuller & Johnson 2009). It has been suggested that we form attitudes towards our jobs by taking into account our feelings, our beliefs, and our behaviours (Weiss, 2002). The term job satisfaction will therefore be used to refer to an individual’s positive thoughts, feelings and actions in response to their employment (Illies, Fulmer, Spitzmuller & Johnson, 2009).

Job satisfaction theories are also referred to as discrepancy theories. Job dissatisfaction is referred to in equity theory as a result of the discrepancy between expectations and reality (Landy, 1989). In self-efficacy theory it is thought that dissatisfaction with one’s job is a result of person comparing themselves unfavourably with a standard goal that they have set for themselves. It has therefore been suggested that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are variables on a pleasant-unpleasant continuum that has implications for actions (Landy, 1989). Therefore, in using this definition throughout this thesis the term job dissatisfaction will be used to refer to unpleasurable feelings, thoughts and behaviours one has in response to aspects of their employment. However, although satisfaction and dissatisfaction will be viewed as on a continuum this does not imply that the existence or absence of individual antecedents directly link to the levels of satisfaction one may experience.
The term approbation is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford Dictionaries, 2010, p. 42) as “formal or official approval”. However, it is understood in various ways including moral, social and Catholic canon law. In a meritocracy, it is often assumed that approbation is linked to recognition of merit in an individual's actions. Throughout this thesis the term approbation will be used to refer to the idea that our peers or those in authority believe that we are special, have skills, talent or put in high effort and that they acknowledge this is some way (Cowan & Jonard, 2007).

2.1.2 Search strategy

The search strings used in undertaking the literature review were as follows:

The top 200 results using PSYCHINFO and ERIC were considered for the following search strings:

*Occupational stress, workforce reform, burnout, Multi-agency, Multi-disciplinary, Job satisfaction, Educational psychology job, Children’s services, Staff retention, Staff absence, Approbation, Every child matters, Locality teams, cultural mapping, soft systems methodology, rich pictures, organisational change, school psychologist, multi-agency satisfaction job dissatisfaction, organisational psychology, job dissatisfaction, local authority employees, social work satisfaction, occupational psychology, organisational psychology.*

Back copies of a number of individual journals were also considered including Educational & Child Psychology, Educational Psychology in Practice and The British Journal of Educational Psychology.

The references for all selected studies were also checked leading to consideration of a number of related studies.

2.2 THE RATIONALE FOR PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Job satisfaction is an important area of research as it is related to negatively perceived behaviours such as tardiness, absenteeism, and turnover (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2001). Research from a range of industries and organisations has highlighted a number of factors linked to job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation. There appears to be a mixture of person and situational factors
influencing job satisfaction (Arvey, Carter & Buerkley, 1991). One of the main reasons for investigating job satisfaction is to ensure that key professionals are retained (Sahoo & Sahoo, 2009). Therefore there is a financial incentive to maintain competent, contented staff. Typically, studies in human services organisations have focused on issues pertaining to employee turnover and burnout (Ellett, 2001). The cost of acquiring experienced personnel and the cost of losing such personnel is substantial to an organisation (Mattox & Jinkerson, 2005). Overall organisational performance has been shown to suffer most when employees highly regarded by others in the organisation choose to leave (Shevchuk, 2009).

Self-efficacy is a person’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1994). It has been considered a reliable predictor of job satisfaction, while job satisfaction is predictive of employees staying in post (Cahalane & Sites, 2008). However, high self-efficacy can also affect turnover intention negatively (Carlson, 2009). Staff who feel they are highly competent but not appreciated are more likely to leave the organisation than those with low self-efficacy.

Job satisfaction has also been associated with positive organisational outcomes such as increased employee productivity and higher innovation which are both linked to improved organisational performance. Motivation is considered to be a primary determinant of job satisfaction. It is therefore in an organisation’s interest to ensure that their employees are highly motivated and satisfied with their employment (Sledge, Miles & Coppage, 2008).

Studies that have focused on job dissatisfaction have demonstrated that this too is an important area of research. For instance, workers from a number of professions have consistently highlighted bureaucracy, policies, procedures and directives perceived as imposed from central offices and governments as contributing factors to dissatisfaction (Badillo, 2005). Likewise feeling that one cannot be transparent in one’s job (De Castro, 2003) being subject to perceived ineffectual management styles (Leer, 2006) or being asked to compromise
one’s work/life balance in favour of work (Hughes & Bozionelos, 2007) have all been associated with job dissatisfaction.

Many studies of employee attitudes and behaviours have been concerned with professions such as Educational Psychology in which employees have client or patient responsibilities. Research demonstrates a link between employee and client satisfaction (Collins, Collins, McKinnies & Jenson, 2008). The reported job satisfaction levels of employees working in service professions is strongly linked with the levels of satisfaction expressed on customer evaluation questionnaires (Gil, Berenguer & Cervera, 2008).

2.3 THEORIES OF JOB SATISFACTION

Below are presented three influential theories that have attempted to explain job satisfaction.

2.3.1 Affect Theory

Locke’s Range of Affect Theory (1976) is perhaps the most influential theory of job satisfaction. Locke defined job satisfaction as “the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one’s job values” (Locke, 1969, p.316). He proposed that the appraisal process comprises of the perception of some aspect of the job, an implicit or explicit value standard and a conscious or subconscious judgment of the relationship between (e.g., discrepancy between) one’s perception(s) and one’s value(s)” (Locke, 1969, p. 316).

In other words satisfaction is determined by a discrepancy between what one wants in a job and what one has in a job. The theory also states that how much one values a particular aspect of work (e.g. working directly with clients) moderates how satisfied/dissatisfied one feels when expectations are/are not met. Locke (1976) defined values as desires or wants and included the intensity of feeling or level of importance of the value to the individual. He said these are different to needs which are objective requirements for survival. He felt that the fulfilment of values leads to job satisfaction provided that values are compatible with needs. Locke also distinguished values from expectations, which he described as beliefs about the future. He argued that a discrepancy
between perceptions and expectations leads to surprise, which can be either satisfying or dissatisfying depending on the event.

Locke’s model has sustained appeal over many years. It defines key constructs, describes how discrepancies relate to satisfaction and explains that a superior criterion for discrepancies is not what people expect or objectively need, but rather what they value. Locke also pointed out that people use values to appraise their job as they perceive it, which might diverge from how the job may be perceived by objective observers. However, there is still a primary issue with this model. The definition of job satisfaction provided by Locke combines the discrepancy between perceptions and values with the emotional state. However, it could be argued that the emotional state is shaped by the discrepancy and should thus be viewed separately. As such, Locke’s definition renders the relationship between discrepancies and satisfaction circular.

2.3.2 Motivation-hygiene theory

While it could be argued that empowerment and disempowerment are two sides of the same coin the same has not been proposed for satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Herzberg’s motivation-hygiene theory (1968) states that there are certain factors in the workplace that causes job satisfaction, while different factors are linked to dissatisfaction (Williams, 2008). Herzberg believed that motivators give positive satisfaction from intrinsic conditions of the job. These include such factors as challenging work, recognition and responsibility. He believed that hygiene factors are extrinsic to the work and include status, job security and salary. These do not give positive satisfaction, though their absence results in dissatisfaction. Therefore, hygiene factors are required to ensure the employee is not dissatisfied, while the motivation factors motivate to perform (Williams, 2008).

Although the Motivator-Hygiene concept is still used it has been heavily criticized (King, 1970). For instance the theory does not allow for individual personality trait differences, which would affect responses to motivating or hygiene factors. The theory also explicitly assumes that those who are satisfied with their job are bound to have higher productivity rates. Another criticism is that the theory explains behaviour clustered around the mean and thereby has
little explanation for exceptions, many of which may prove quite logical. For instance, if becoming a better angler makes an individual feel more recognized by colleagues, they may think about it extensively while working and hence reduce output.

2.3.3 Core Self-evaluation Model

A significant model currently in use is the Core Self-evaluations Model (Judge, 1998). He argued that there are four Core Self-evaluations that determine one’s disposition towards job satisfaction: self esteem, general self efficacy, locus of control and neuroticism. This theory states that higher levels of self-esteem (the value one places on his/her self) and general self-efficacy (the belief in one’s own competence) lead to higher work satisfaction. Having an internal locus of control (believing one has control over her \ his own life, as opposed to outside forces having control) leads to higher job satisfaction. Finally, lower levels of neuroticism (enduring tendency to experience negative emotional states) lead to higher job satisfaction. Judge argued that the four traits are interrelated as part of an individual’s inner self-concept.

There have been problems with empirical validity as the four constituent traits display slightly differential relations with criterion variables. Initial studies demonstrated a strong correlation between core self-evaluations and reported levels of job satisfaction. However, core self-evaluation tools have been extended to general health and well-being, social satisfaction and other areas. Therefore, it could be argued that core self-evaluation tools are not simply a predictor of job satisfaction but measure something much wider.

While research highlights factors related to job satisfaction, a lack of a unifying theory and ongoing development of theory means that at the current time, the literature appears to be fragmented.

2.4 JOB SATISFACTION

Job satisfaction research has revealed a number of factors that appear important to individuals across a range of roles and professions. For instance, autonomy is often referred to as a key influence on job satisfaction for professionals. A child welfare study found that staff members’ who had a
positive perception about work tasks also felt they had high self-efficacy and autonomy (Ellett, 2001). Similarly, research with general practitioners showed that they linked value and job satisfaction to autonomy in their practice (Bouwkamp, 2009).

Job satisfaction and empowerment are also positively related (Bhargava & Kelkar, 2000). It is suggested that employees who believe they have choices and can influence their environment may be more likely to perceive job satisfaction (Sharma & Chaudhara, 1980). Recent research suggests that voluntary and unrewarded overtime workers had a relatively high income and favourable job characteristics and are usually non-fatigued and satisfied, even without rewards. This study concluded that choice when working overtime is important for well-being (Beckers, Van Der Linden, Smulders, Kompier, Taris & Geurts, 2008). High income autonomous workers are also likely to display altruism in their work and link this to job satisfaction (Gothill, 1998). However, this may not represent that higher income employees are more altruistic, rather that they have more choice.

Empowerment is particularly important for employees who feel competent within their organisation (Wang & Lee, 2009). A recent study found that employees rated empowerment as the most important factor linked to job satisfaction (Kostiwa & Meeks, 2009). This correlation appears to exist regardless of culture or setting. For instance, hourly workers in a beverage factory in Nigeria were most satisfied in their work when they were encouraged to participate in decision-making on issues affecting them (Gberevbie, 2008). Professional workers appear to link empowerment more with advancement opportunities (Hausknecht, Rodda & Howard, 2009). However, the correlation remains constant regardless of the status in the organisation of the participant.

Research suggests that supporting employees both at work and home enhances the subjective well-being of individual employees (Van Steenbergen & Ellemers, 2009). Many companies adopt work/life balance policies such as maternity leave and emergency child care in an attempt to retain capable female employees. Research shows that such policies increase female employee retention rates (Mastri, 2007). This is of particular relevance to the
female dominated EP profession in the UK. It is suggested that in order to be effective, work/life balance policies need to become part of the organisation’s culture (Brough, Holt, Bauld, Biggs & Ryan, 2008).

It has been said that a measure of the extent to which a profession values itself is the quality of nurture and support offered to its new members (Lunt, 1993). Support within a role appears to be an important factor with regards to job satisfaction in a range of professions and appears to be linked to the age of the individual and how long they have been in the career. Research suggests a clear interdependence between a person’s age, the duration of their professional career, and the need they expressed for support (Strykowska & Trzeciakowska, 1994). Generational differences can be a creative strength in the workplace. The attitudinal and generational differences may result in different levels of job satisfaction within each generation. However, a recent study suggests that generational differences in job satisfaction may not be as dramatic as previously expected (Eaton, 2009).

Individuals vary systematically in their personality depending upon context. They are usually significantly more conscientious and open to experience and less extraverted at work compared to at home. Work personality is a better predictor of job satisfaction than both global personality and home personality (Heller, Ferris, Brown & Watson, 2009). However, there is suggestive yet inconclusive evidence that emotional intelligence may be a more robust predictor of job satisfaction. A recent study found that personality factors and emotional intelligence, while correlated, appear to be separate constructs. Dimensions of emotional intelligence had several significant correlations with levels of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and occupational commitment (Howard, 2009).

Organisational variables most commonly associated with job satisfaction and performance are the climate and perceived culture of the organisation (Giri & Kumar, 2007). Cultural climate has a significant influence on job satisfaction (Charles, 2009). Not surprisingly organisational climate has been shown to be positively related to job satisfaction and negatively related to job anxiety (Sharma & Sharma, 1989). Empirical evidence from a study with highly skilled
and educated public child welfare workers also suggests that efforts to retain staff should focus on creating positive organisational climates (Cahalane & Sites, 2008).

The degree to which an employee identifies with the organisation for which they work is also of significance. Job satisfaction, organisational identification and turnover intention are related. This pattern remained true when gender, age, type of organisation, culture, and length of tenure are accounted for (De Moura, Abrams, Retter, Gunnarsdottir & Ando, 2009). These findings are consistent with a social identity theory perspective and with the idea that identification is a more proximal predictor of turnover intention. Over and above job satisfaction, organisational identification offers a strong psychological anchor that discourages turnover intention in a range of organisational contexts (De Moura, Abrams, Retter, Gunsersdottir & Ando, 2009).

2.5 APPROBATION

The importance of approbation in one’s job is not a new discovery. In the 1930s research demonstrated that individuals need and respond positively to recognition and reward. Treating a worker as an individual and recognising and praising effort results in happier and more valuable employees (Shepard, 1937). These findings are equally relevant today. Non-material rewards still lead to positive employee outcomes and strengthen the relationship between organisational citizenship behaviour and personal accomplishment (Hannam & Jimmieson, 2007). Unfortunately, many employees working in education report a lack of approbation as a key factor in leaving posts even though implementing strategies has little or no cost implications (Bialopotocki, 2007). It has been recommended that university administrator and teacher education programs add courses to their programs of study teaching ways to provide effective non-monetary recognition and praise to teachers (Bialopotocki, 2007).

Approbation is beneficial to the organisation providing the praise as well as the recipient. An intervention package used with staff in a mental health team included praise from supervisors as a key element. This led to significant performance improvements. A post intervention follow up over two years later found that the improvements had been maintained. Costs were minimised and
the intervention components became part of the normal day-to-day operations of the agency (Langeland, Johnson & Mawhinney, 1998). Research from the hotel industry found that praise for completed work led to hotel employees displaying more creativity in their work as well as higher rates of motivation and job satisfaction (Wong & Ladkin, 2008).

Supervision also relates to job satisfaction. In the banking industry satisfaction with supervision had a significant impact on job satisfaction (Mardanov, Heischmidt & Henson, 2008). Agency supervisees' perceptions of clinical supervision and the supervisory working alliance were also found to be good predictors of perceived levels of job satisfaction (Sterner, 2009). Another financial service study considered a company who introduced good quality positive feedback with a more nurturing and congruent style of supervision and management. After twelve months of the new approach employees said they were more satisfied with their jobs. This was supported by a drop in attrition rates from 38% to 15% (Bubenick, 2004).

### 2.6 JOB DISSATISFACTION

Job satisfaction research has revealed a number of factors that are important to individuals across a range of professions and the reverse also appears to be true. Research considering barriers to job satisfaction highlight a number of issue that again generalise across a wide range of jobs.

Work demands in the 21st century present pressures that contribute to dissatisfaction for employees. Modern technology is usually presented as a means by which pressures should be reduced, however, in reality this is often not the case. For instance, many LAs now make use of online virtual learning environments to provide compulsory staff training on a range of topics including health and safety and security. However, research shows that employees are often told to complete the modules at a time convenient for them, yet are given compulsory deadlines without allocated time to complete the work (Allan & Lewis, 2006). This is one of a series of modern job requirements that impacts on work/life balance and stress (Allan & Lewis, 2006).
Within the European Union the reconciliation of work and family has become a core concern for policy intervention at national levels (Gregory & Milner, 2009). However, the associated benefits are not always realised and work/life balance policies can result in increased levels of work/life conflict (Brough, et al., 2008). When employees do feel they are able to maintain a good work/life balance they often link this to good local support. For instance, a recent military study found both employees and their spouses perceived greatest support for work/life balance from immediate supervisors rather than the military itself (Matsch, Sachau, Gertz & Englert, 2009).

Dysfunctions in role have also been associated with a number of negative consequences affecting the well-being of workers and the functioning of organisations. An individual's experience of receiving incompatible or conflicting requests (role conflict) and/or the lack of enough information to carry out his/her job (role ambiguity) are key causes of role stress (Anton, 2009). These factors are often present in co-located and multi-agency teams (Doll, Acker & Goalstone, 2000). They are also variables proposed as causes of stress in EPs (Huberty & Huebner, 1988).

If empowerment is linked to job satisfaction it would seem logical to hypothesise that disempowerment may correlate with job dissatisfaction. There is statistical evidence to indicate that job dissatisfaction is significantly related to the IT professional's perceived lack of influence over IT outsourcing decisions (Tan, 2009). Studies suggest that when organisations become more centralized the levels of perceived employee empowerment reduce as do reported levels of job satisfaction (Bhargava & Kelkar, 2000). This has obvious implications for the ways that various LAs choose to re-organise staff in light of the British coalition government's comprehensive spending review of October 2010 and subsequent cuts in LA funding. It also indicates the importance of decentralization for managing people in organisations (Bhargava & Kelkar, 2000).

In summary, dissatisfaction with one's job appears to come from an array of sources. The pace and pressure of 21st century life has been shown to contribute to stress and make work/life balance policies difficult to implement effectively. Role ambiguity and lack of job security are often present in an ever
changing world where jobs are continually being re-defined. This in turn feeds into employees feeling disempowered, particularly when big decisions about their future such as potential outsourcing are made with little consultation or choice.

2.7 ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

The global economic crisis that began in 2008 is expected to impact on the everyday lives of individuals across the world. At the time of writing there exists great uncertainty about the future for many professions including educational psychology. Although EPs are generally optimistic, the profession was already undergoing a period of rapid change and uncertainty before the economic crisis began. This was already leading to significant challenges and anxieties. There is a widely acknowledged identity crisis currently taking place within the EP profession (Norwich, 2005; Gaskell & Leadbetter, 2009; Love, 2009).

The practice of educational psychology is taking place in a complex, challenging and ever-changing context where professional confidence may be difficult to maintain and where it may be easy for EP practitioners to lose sight of the beliefs, hopes and aspirations with which they entered the profession (Cameron, 2006, p.289).

Over the past few years there has been pressure from central and local government to squeeze into a new service model for children. At the time of writing, funding for future training was suspended while a wide ranging review of Special Educational Needs was taking place. This is at a time when the profession is re-evaluating the relevance of their skills and knowledge.

Organisational change has long been an area of intensive psychological research. A study of organisational change in military organisations found that it could impact on identity, commitment, interorganisational perceptions, and the behaviour of the participants (Woods, 2009). People make sense of organisational change based on how the change either enhances or diminishes their individual and organisational identity. As people engage in this sense making process, it has been suggested that they interpret these changes through four aspects of trust: trust in organisation, trust in leadership, trust in
process, and trust in outcome (Sloyan, 2009). It is suggested that these four aspects of trust interrelate as they are based primarily on the individual's perception of the organisation. This is influenced by the degree of belief the individual has in the competency and integrity of the leadership and the perception of fairness in the change process. These then impact on the level of optimism individuals have for positive outcomes. However, this study appeared to consider employees primarily as independent individuals and did not appear to give a great deal of consideration to the role of group dynamics in influencing each area of trust.

A study of four Taiwanese government departments undergoing change found that organisational change had a significant negative influence on employees' trust and job involvement. However, stress management strategies and an understanding of organisational change appears to positively influence employees' organisational identification and job involvement (Yu, 2009). Research shows that organisational and employment setting influenced job satisfaction and retention (Armstrong, Hawley, Lewis, Blankenship & Pugsley, 2008). A recent study investigating job satisfaction of mid-level police managers found that organisational variables were better predictors of job satisfaction among mid-level managers than demographic variables (Ercikti, 2009). Organisational variables are also strongly linked with perceived levels of job satisfaction (Crawford, 2009).

Much appears to depend upon how change is implemented. Research undertaken by Tvedt, Saksvik & Nytro (2009) demonstrates that a number of factors are associated with successful change. These include the management's awareness that the change may be experienced differently by various individuals and groups (diversity); availability of the manager during the process; the degree to which conflicts are resolved constructively; and the degree to which the new roles to be taken on are clarified. A healthy process may not reduce the additional demands produced by organisational change. However, it may be able to reduce the experience of stress and facilitate coping with stress and associated increased demands through enhancing the psychosocial work environment (Tvedt, et al., 2009).
Anxiety within the EP profession has surfaced concerning professional training, uncertainty about EP’s professional role in children’s workforce, and a lack of confidence in EPs ability to influence future developments in services for children and young people (Norwich, 2005). EPs are not immune from the emotional impact of change and stress and it has been argued that it is imperative to be positive, forward looking and skilled at scoping the evolving environment in order to take advantage of developing opportunities (Gersch, 2009). It is argued that although the profession has the potential for a vibrant future, it is incumbent upon participating professionals to get it right and ensure individuals are sufficiently skilled so that they can be seen as relevant to the current challenges (Gersch, 2009).

It has been suggested that there can be no future for EPs within the narrow boundaries of special educational needs and the servicing of bureaucratic educational functions (MacKay, 2006). However in the same year that MacKay gave this warning a DfES review of the role and contribution of EPs found that they are now engaged in a broad range of activities (Squires, Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney & O’Connor, 2007). Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) have responded in a variety of ways to recent initiatives and legislation by central government. For instance, Hampshire EPS have embraced the development of a community educational psychology orientation. They argued that reconstructing professional practice as community educational psychologists provides them with the possibility of a shared vision, unity of purpose, and political focus (Stringer, Powell & Burton, 2006). It could be argued that such a move demonstrates EPs promoting broader and more relevant roles.

2.8 THE EP PROFESSION AND CURRENT CONTEXT

In order to contextualise the work currently undertaken by EPs it is important that a brief explanation of the historical context of the profession is provided. This will help link the current role EPs perform to the recent government agendas such as Every Child Matters (ECM) (DfES, 2003) which provides the remit to all Children’s Services professionals for greater multi-agency working.
This section will conclude with an examination of EPs as multi-agency professionals.

2.8.1 The historical context

The development of educational psychology in the UK has been more organic and reactive than systematic (Kelly, Woolfson & Boyle, 2008). As previously mentioned many EPs in England are employed directly by LAs. This is partly a result of the influential Summerfield Report (DES, 1968) which recommended that EPs should be administratively responsible to local authority education departments. Some would argue that this represented the beginning of EPs becoming key professionals in the assessment of SEN within education. In the mid 1970s the government first suggested that an assessment report from an EP when ascertaining SEN for a child was desirable (Kelly et al., 2008). The 1981 education act extended the role for EPs with the introduction of a legal requirement for psychological advice to inform the statement of SEN, issued by the LA. This role has been reaffirmed in subsequent revisions to legislation including the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act of 2001.

However, government has recognised that a growing pressure to assess children for statements of SEN led to EPs spending much of their time working on statutory assessment rather than providing support, interventions and strategic input. The profession has been committed to a move away from a predominantly child-deficit professional focus (Kelly et al., 2008). The desire for some time has been to approach educational issues and problems via sociological and social psychological theories under the collective term of social constructionism (Kelly et al., 2008). The “Educational Psychology Services (England) Current Role, Good Practice and Future Directions” report (DfEE, 2000) made a commitment to explore ways of changing the balance of EP’s work to ensure their expertise is used more effectively. EPs have influenced statutes, government circulars and guidance and local education authority policy, with regard to SEN and inclusion. This represents a wider commitment to move from a medical model to an ecological, educational approach. However, few would argue that there is still a long way to go and that many of the original frustrations experienced by EPs remain.
2.8.2 Role of the EP

As the profession of educational psychology continues to be redefined in the contemporary context of multi-agency working practice, there remains a central role for applied psychologists to share their theory, practice and research (James, 2009). A Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) document on EPSs views the work of EPs in broad terms as providing assessment, consultation, advice and training to early years settings, schools, families and the Local Education Authority (DfEE, 2000). In summarising earlier literature Fallon, Woods & Rooney (2010) produced a considered definition of the role of the EP as follows:

*EPs are fundamentally scientist-practitioners who utilise, for the benefit of children and young people (CYP), psychological skills, knowledge and understanding through the functions of consultation, assessment, intervention, research and training, at organisational, group or individual level across educational, community and care settings, with a variety of role partners.* (p.4)

2.8.3 Every Child Matters and the multi-agency agenda

It is axiomatic to state that this is a time of radical change for all services working with children in the UK (Baxter & Frederickson, 2005). More than 20 years of research has highlighted the need for the different professionals and services that support children in the UK to work more closely together. Since 2003 national and local governments in England have embarked on sweeping reforms aimed at improving and integrating local health, education and social services for children (Abbott, Watson & Townsley, 2005). The publication of the Green Paper “Every Child Matters” and the passage of the 2004 Children Act marked a significant shift in thinking about and the organisation of Children's Services. Legislation placed a duty on Children's Services and their relevant partners to cooperate to improve the well-being of children (Thorpe, Regan, Mason & May-Chahal, 2007). However, the review of SEN being undertaken at the time of writing by the coalition government is likely to result in yet more significant changes to practice for professionals working in the education sector in England and Wales.
Effective multi-agency working is highlighted by the government as key to meeting the needs of vulnerable young people. While the Government has presented the changes primarily as a response to the Laming Report (Laming, 2003) into the death of Victoria Climbie, they are much more than this. The changes build on many of the ideas and policies the Government had been developing over a number of years, which emphasise the importance of intervening in children’s lives at an early stage in order to prevent problems in later life (Parton, 2006). Research demonstrates that professionals generally support the changes but also find them stressful (Bachmann, et al., 2009). However, fears have been expressed that multi-agency working may lead to the blurring of professional boundaries, erosion of professional identity and the implementation of protocols that are too broad to be effective (Moran, Jacobs, Bunn & Bifulco, 2007).

The recent review of the EP profession (Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, Squires & O’Connor, 2006) found that the range of different agencies, voluntary organisations and professional groups with which EPs engage in multi agency work was extensive. Amongst others it included social workers, education welfare officers, residential support workers, child psychiatrists, child clinical psychologists, paediatricians, speech or language therapists, youth offending team staff, connection workers, parent partnership workers, schoolteachers, specialist teachers, special educational needs coordinators, police staff, portage workers, specialist nurses, physiotherapists and occupational therapists. The study found that many of the professions and agencies who work with EPs felt that EPs can make important contributions within multi-agency settings. These include the application of psychological methods, concepts, models, theories and knowledge. They also reported that EPs are well placed to coordinate agencies and liaise between school and community (Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, Squires & O’Connor, 2006). However, a large number of those involved in the study believed that these applications were not necessarily distinctive to EPs and that other providers might be equally well qualified to carry out these roles.

One consequence of ECM was the restructuring of LA departments to combine education and social care as an “Integrated Children’s Services”. There has
been substantial guidance from government on workforce reform (Fallon, Woods & Rooney, 2010). In some instances this has resulted in shared accommodation, co-located teams and moves to combine some policies and procedures between disciplines via the use of the “Common Assessment Framework” (CAF). However, the implementation of changes across authorities has varied widely.

2.8.4 EPs as multi-agency professionals

In line with other LA professionals working directly with children, EPs recognise that integrated services have created major opportunities for the profession. However, it is also felt that it presents some significant risk factors which the profession needs to be alert to and manage positively and assertively (Booker, 2005). It has been suggested that recent publications outlining government strategy have created an urgent need for the profession to consider future directions (Baxter & Frederickson, 2005). With Every Child Matters the initiatives are led by five aims for children of: be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; achieve economic well-being. In order to achieve these community wide aims Children’s Services professionals will need to adapt their goals and practices (Glenny & Mannion, 2005). As professionals often working under the umbrella of Children’s Services, this applies equally to EPs.

Research (Gaskell & Leadbetter, 2009) suggests that multi-agency working enhances feelings of professional identity for EPs and make them feel more engaged with the organisation for which they work. Participants in this study indicated that this was aided by the clarification and development of their own skills and in other cases by being afforded the opportunity to work creatively in a wider range of contexts (Gaskell & Leadbetter, 2009). Over and above job satisfaction, organisational identification offers a strong psychological anchor that discourages turnover intention in a range of organisational contexts (De Moura, Abrams, Retter, Gunnarsdottir & Ando, 2009). The flexibility of multi-agency working appears to have presented opportunities for individuals to work to their strengths (Gaskell & Leadbetter, 2009). This suggests that multi-agency working may enhance job satisfaction for the profession.
In many parts of the country EPs are already working successfully as part of multi-agency teams. It has been argued that EPs have a vital role to play in the multi-agency context of Children’s Services. For instance, it has been suggested that EPs wide range of skills enables them to help teams to establish a shared vision, to understand the roles and responsibilities of team members, evaluate the outcomes of their work, and help teams in relation to joint training (Watson, 2006). It has also been suggested that although opportunities may exist to work in more systemic ways the importance of casework based interventions must not be forgotten (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009).

There is limited research evidence about the impact of evidence-based practice by UK professionals responsible for delivery (Aarons, Fettes, Flores & Sommerfeld, 2009). With a central government remit, research must be a core function for EPs (MacKay, 2002). They are well positioned to help disseminate systematically gathered research across Children’s Services (Topping, Smith, Barrow, Hannah & Kerr, 2007). This focus on evidence-based practice may support EPs in their work with other teams and agencies. It is argued that evidence-based practice enables EPs to derive a greater sense of confidence and professional identity, both within the wider discipline of psychology and in the particular educational contexts in which they practice (Miller & Todd, 2002).

### 2.9 EP SATISFACTION, DISSATISFACTION AND APPROBATION

Having considered research from a broad spectrum of professions we now begin to examine those studies that most closely relate to job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation for EPs. Studies exist that consider parental satisfaction of EP delivery (Cuckle & Bamford, 2000), satisfaction levels of students of educational psychology (Schneider & Roebers, 2000) and job satisfaction for US based school psychologists (Wright, 1989). However, as yet there appear to be a limited number of studies that consider job satisfaction, approbation or dissatisfaction for UK based EPs. Therefore it was decided to identify and review studies that most closely matched the current research focus. This was done by examining the US based research and also by looking at research focusing on satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation for other professionals working within UK local authorities.
A recent publication by the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) found that EPs are generally clear and positive about their specific contribution within multi-disciplinary settings and see the potential to extend their roles in specific ways. However, investigations cited in the publication identified barriers to further role expansion such as limited service capacity; the need for evidence about where EP input is most effective; limited views of their role by others, and the EPs' own training needs (AEP, 2008).

Many factors previously identified as correlating with job satisfaction are potentially relevant to EPs working in a multi-agency context. However, the impact of a number of the key influences is likely to prove difficult to gauge during organisational transition.

2.9.1 Research most closely related to the current study

There has been little research of job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation for EPs in the UK. However, a national survey by Male and Jensen (1998) investigated the career continuation plans, and factors likely to be associated with them, of 61 (56% response) main grade and Senior Educational Psychologists across seven services. The study made use of a questionnaire adapted from a previous study of career continuation plans and job satisfaction of special educational needs co-ordinators. Using mainly Likert-type scales the questionnaire asked participants to rate their attitudes to a variety of factors associated with job satisfaction including administrative support and workload.

The results indicated that overall job satisfaction was high with respondents particularly satisfied with the amount of secretarial support they received, role clarity, autonomy and support from colleagues. They were less satisfied with the time available to complete paperwork, number of meetings they had to attend and the time available to carry out direct work. The majority indicated that they expected to remain in post for the foreseeable future unless retirement was imminent. However, a significant proportion of respondents report finding the job stressful and over ninety percent thought the pace of change was too fast.
In 2006, a meta-analysis was published that considered eight studies that had used the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) between 1982 and 1999 researching job satisfaction for US based school psychologists. The analysis indicated that nearly 85% of the 2116 participants were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs (Vanvoorhis & Levinson, 2006). This figure was much higher than the general job satisfaction figure of 51% for US workers (Neill, 2002). School psychologists were most satisfied with their relationship with co-workers and the opportunity to stay busy on the job. They were also satisfied with the opportunity to work independently and be of service to others in a way that reflected their own moral values. Dissatisfaction came from lack of opportunities for advancement, levels of compensation, supervision and school policies and practice.

There are a number of limitations to the meta-analysis that need to be acknowledged. The participants were not necessarily representative of the membership of the National Association of School Psychologists, nearly 50% worked with three or less colleagues, some of the analysis techniques differed, the studies only considered full time employees and the majority of the studies took place in the eastern United States. It would also be difficult to make a direct comparison with UK EPs who are usually part of a LA rather than being directly employed by schools. Some studies also suggest that job satisfaction may be positively related to state school psychology organisation memberships.

In the UK professional membership is not organised on a regional basis as in most of the US. UK based EPs are often members of the Association of Educational Psychologists which acts as a professional body and trade union for the profession. They may also be members of The British Psychological Society. Since 2009 they have also been required to become registrants of the Health Professions Council which also operates at a national level.

Previous studies in the US have consistently found that psychologists working in educational settings have high levels of job satisfaction and that this has increased slightly over the previous 22 years (Worrell, Skaggs & Brown, 2006). This study based on surveys sent to 500 randomly selected members of the National Association of School Psychologists found that the 308 respondents were most satisfied with the social service, independence and values aspects of
their jobs. They were also very satisfied with their co-workers and job activities. Satisfaction with job security, compensation and working conditions improved the most over the 20 year time span. However, opportunities for advancement and school system policies and practices remain sources of job dissatisfaction (Worrell et al., 2006). However, again there were key differences between the US sample and UK EPs. For instance, nearly 70% were not supervised by someone within their profession. Over half work in a context where there was a psychologist to student ratio of over 1:2000. The ability to practice was determined by a combination of national and state licences and there appeared to be greater restrictions on practice that may have serious consequences for career advancement opportunities.

Most of the job satisfaction research has been limited to quantitative data based upon the pre-defined US standardised MSQ (Worrell et al., 2006). There are a number of issues with the continued use of this questionnaire without it being updated and re-standardised. For instance, it was designed for a US population in 1967 rather than a UK population in 2010. The questionnaire has been standardised with a number of professions including social workers, nurses and teachers. However, no psychologists from any branch of the profession were included in the sample. While the MSQ scales have been shown to have adequate internal consistency the reliability of some scales tends to vary across groups. Therefore, the lack of psychologists in the standardisation is an issue. It could also be argued that some of the questions have limited relevance to EPs. For instance “The way promotions are given out on this job” may well be less relevant to EPs than it might be for those working in a commercial field. Another issue worth noting is that many of the professions that the questionnaire was first standardised with no longer exist (typists), are carried out elsewhere (assemblers) or have significantly changed (secretaries). At the same time new professions have emerged over the past 40 years including most of those associated with IT.

A number of professional groups are employed by local authorities and work directly with children and their families. It is therefore important to highlight ways in which EPs differ from other professionals with regard to job satisfaction and approbation. One professional group are social workers. However, it is difficult
to attempt a direct comparison. There are many differences in the roles that individual social workers perform and the client groups with which they work. For instance, some social workers are required to take referrals from numerous sources, offer first line support and carry out initial assessments within very short periods of time in line with statutory guidelines. Others are involved in long term care planning and working with clients other than children. Each role brings with it its own challenges and satisfactions.

A study in which fifty social workers were interviewed suggests that a substantial proportion experience mental health issues such as clinical depression (Stanley, Manthorpe & White, 2007). It has been suggested that this finding is not replicated for EPs (Gersch, 2009). However, it should be noted that this assertion is based upon the personal reflections of an experienced EP, researcher and trainer of EPs rather than direct research. Other studies have shown that newly qualified social workers generally start their first job with optimism and confidence. However, this is quickly replaced by feeling frustrated, unhappy, disillusioned, unmotivated and lacking in self-belief (Jack & Donnellan, 2008). More than a half either wanted to leave their job within six months or were actively seeking to leave (Evans & Huxley, 2009). This is also in direct opposition to EPs who it is reported have much to feel optimistic and positive about (Gersch, 2009).

Research does though suggest that social workers share a number of characteristics with EPs. For instance both professions are female dominated (Beaver, 1999), individuals within each often carry a caseload (Boston, 2009) and members of both professions report that there is an interaction between family life and work and that this is not necessarily a negative (Carpenter, 1998). Social worker studies on job satisfaction have reported a number of related factors. For instance, having a supervisor who enables the individual to do their job (Elpers, 2002) positive organizational conditions (Acker, 2004) and feeling included in the team (Acquavita, Pittman, Gibbons & Castellanos-Brown, 2009). Studies looking at dissatisfaction for social workers show that many feel that the pressures and demands placed upon them is often greater than their ability to deliver an effective service (Bhana & Haffejee, 1996) which may in part
account for the shortage of social workers to fill posts particularly in Children’s Services (Evans & Huxley, 2009).

The EP role is ever changing and developing. In order to adapt effectively it is essential that the profession is aware of how it might be different and similar to other professionals within Children’s Services. This is particularly relevant with regards to stress, satisfaction, approbation and morale. Research suggests that the current roles EPs undertake make them different to other professionals within Children’s Services. For instance, social care staff feel there is little job satisfaction for their profession due to an over concern for bureaucratic detail, quick fixes and professional scapegoating. Many feel this leads to severe limitations on informed innovation and creativity (Fish, 2009). EPs, however, feel optimistic that they are beginning to get the opportunities to demonstrate what highly trained applied psychologists can do, what psychology has to offer, and what flexibility EPs can bring to their interaction with others (Squires & Farrell, 2007).

In comparing EPs to other LA professionals we must ask what is it about EPs that is distinctive? (Cameron, 2006). In considering job satisfaction dissatisfaction and approbation for EPs it is important to attempt to tease out the differences between EPs and other LA professionals. Cameron (2006) suggests that there are a number of distinctive contributions that EPs make that set them apart. For instance, he argues that by adopting a psychological perspective on the nature of human problems, unlike other professionals EPs can attempt to understand and reconcile the different perspectives which people may bring to a particular problem situation. He also suggests that the majority of professionals will look no further than a correlation. For instance, a robust finding is that a child on free school meals is more likely to fail at school. It could therefore be argued that the solution would be to help make the child’s family more affluent. However, Cameron argues that EPs are distinctive in that they draw on the knowledge base of psychology to uncover the more subtle mediating variables which may provide an explanation of why certain events may be related. For instance, the teacher’s preconceptions of the abilities of children on free schools, the child’s self esteem and motivation or cultural beliefs about academic achievement within the child’s family.
Cameron also argues that EPs actively consider the different dimensions to problems by using sophisticated models. They then perform the skilled task of providing simple, useful maps of the interaction between people factors and aspects of their living and learning environments. Another distinctive contribution of EPs according to Cameron is using information from the research and psychological theory to recommend “evidence-based” strategies for change. It is suggested that EPs are one of the very few professional groups (and possibly the only one in LAs) who have specific knowledge and skills in research design, are competent in statistical analysis and who are trained to take a constructively critical stance to research findings in general. The last distinctive contribution mentioned is promoting innovative concepts or big ideas which are underpinned by psychological research evidence and theory and which can enable clients to spot potential opportunities for positive change (Cameron, 2006).

2.9.2 What gives EPs job satisfaction

General studies of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction (see sections 2.4 & 2.6) have found that amongst other things individuals value autonomy, empowerment, support, recognition and a positive organisational climate. Widespread frustrations include pressures to meet challenging targets, role ambiguity, uncertainty, lack of security and disempowerment. In considering the facilitators and barriers to job satisfaction for EPs it would be interesting to consider these general findings in more detail, with particular emphasis on the specialist branch of psychology that is the Educational Psychology profession.

Autonomy is a factor linked to job satisfaction that is potentially significant for EPs. The problems most professional EPs face in their work are multifaceted, complex, and not clearly defined (Webster & Bond, 2002) thereby requiring a degree of autonomy for the practitioner. High-status, specialised professionals such as EPs have traditionally laid claim to a large degree of control over how they exercise their responsibilities and this has often been with relative freedom from state interference. However, it has been suggested that increasing accountability within the profession has led to a reduction in practitioner
autonomy (Webster & Hoyle, 2000). The criticisms of professional autonomy often relate to questions of validity and whose interests the autonomy serves.

Highly trained professionals could argue that they are often involved in situations which are not wholly routine and require long periods of higher education and training. This may lead to a wider understanding of the issues involved than those who may wish to restrict or monitor them. It could be argued that this is a reason why high levels of autonomy for EPs should be maintained. The emerging generation of EPs will have trained to doctorate level making them amongst the most qualified professionals within local authorities. The new training requirements to enter the profession should enable EPs to have a good understanding of the strategic complexities involved in promoting and implementing evidence-based practice within local authorities.

Culture and organisational climate appear to be of particular relevance to EPs (Pratt, 1993). This may prove difficult to judge at a time when many services are restructuring. When deciding to take a job in an Educational Psychology Service, EPs base their decision on factors such as the physical setting, friendliness of staff and what the EPS says about itself. However, particular attention is spent trying to gain inside information from a trusted source on the culture and climate (Pratt, 1993).

Other factors that school psychologists have previously identified as being associated with job satisfaction included peer cohesion, supervisor support, clear task orientation, clarity and the chance to innovate (Kaplan, 1995). However, this study was restricted to 205 school psychologists serving the urban school districts of the New York City Board of Education. It is also worth noting that the measure used, The Work Environment Scale (WES), has only been standardised on a US population. The information gained from the scale is also far more restrictive than could be gained from in-depth interviews. For instance, the relationship measure only considers the three areas of involvement, peer cohesion and supervisor support.

One study, again using the MSQ sent to 500 full-time school psychologists (63% response rate) found that respondents were engaged in a variety of roles including assessment, consultation, counselling, research, clerical duties, and
administrative duties and in line with other research the majority reported high levels of job satisfaction (89%) (Bloomquist, 2006). Another study found supervisory support and workplace involvement were most important in satisfaction with the school psychologist job, followed by clarity and little managerial control. Discrepancies between real and ideal levels of physical comfort, managerial control, involvement, autonomy, and innovation also affected school psychologists' job satisfaction (Boulazreg, 1998). However, this study also made use of the Work Environment Scale and the 227 respondents to the survey were all SPs based in Southern California.

Recognition for one’s work or approbation is also important for EPs (Nolan, 1999). EPs have highlighted the importance of supervision as a means by which they receive approbation (Nolan, 1999). Supervision can play a major role within an EPS in terms of supporting, developing and managing the EPs within it (Nolan, 1999). For EPs it has been suggested that high quality supervision is an important foundation for a more self-confident, outward-looking profession, willing to embrace the real meaning of lifelong learning and to use its expertise to address problems that matter to people’s lives (Webster, Hingley & Franey, 2000). Evidence-based professionals such as EPs had lower levels of emotional exhaustion and more job satisfaction when supportive monitoring, approbation and supervision is integral to the role (Aarons, Fettes, Flores & Sommerfeld, 2009). However, questions have been raised as to how easily this can be achieved in multi-disciplinary teams particularly if supervision is provided by those outside of the profession.

2.9.3 What gives EPs job dissatisfaction

Many EPs are sedulous in their report writing. However, they have reported stress due to unavoidable work pressures leading to a backlog of written reports (Burden, 1988). Work pressure may be a key factor for EPs within Children’s Services. While changing roles for EPs may mean a widening of tasks to produce a more diverse profession and a more interesting job, responsibilities also may be more demanding. Requests for involvement and demands from many quarters may lead to increased workloads. EPs ultimately must decide
how to respond and the areas they wish to be involved in and those they want to leave to others (Squires & Farrell, 2007).

Job stress can have an inverse relationship with job satisfaction (Lambert & Paoline, 2008). There are a number of reasons cited by employees as the causes of work stress. Stress and burnout for school psychologists has been shown to relate to the age of the psychologist. One study used the Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI) to look at stress in a number of education based professions. The results revealed that younger psychologists report higher stress levels than older psychologists (Adkins, 2003). However, as there were only 60 psychologists in the study this finding should be treated with caution. Role overload is also an antecedents to burnout (Baergo Cordero, 2009). This appears to be regardless of whether the role overload is imposed or self made. For instance, social work studies have shown that over-involvement in cases affects job satisfaction exclusively through its impact on worker burnout (Koeske & Kelly, 1995).

A US study of 114 school psychologists (Huebner, 1994) considered self-perceived burnout among the participants. Results indicated that the key factor was social support from the psychologist’s supervisor, co-workers and friends. As with other studies, this research also showed that younger psychologists were most likely to experience emotional exhaustion (Huebner, 1994). However, it could be argued that the use of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) may have given participants the impression that burnout was assumed. Likewise, requiring participants to fill in the questionnaire and mail it back to the researcher may have resulted in a bias towards school psychologists who felt strongly about this issue. A similar study (Huebner, 1992) analysed the results of a survey sent to over 350 randomly selected members of the National Association of School Psychologists. Data from the 187 returns found burnout for school psychologists was linked to related stressors including lack of resources, interpersonal conflict, crisis cases, perceived workload and satisfaction with received supervision. However, again use of the Maslach Burnout Inventory may have led to a preconception of burnout by participants.
It has been suggested that there is a need for EPs to develop a variety of coping strategies to deal with increasing job stress (Hoff & Buchholz, 1996). It is proposed that work/life balance for psychologists can be improved by establishing priorities, setting goals and developing a willingness to say no (Lee, Reissing & Dobson, 2009). However, psychologists using coping methods thought to reduce burnout report that they may not adequately address the antecedents (Huebner, 1992).

EPs work in a rapidly changing modern work environment where increasingly new technology is enabling them to work anytime and anywhere. These are just two of the factors that could make it more difficult for EPs to segment work and home life. It has been suggested that there is a need for flexible and innovative solutions to manage the work/life balance (Jones, Burke & Westman, 2006). Research shows that psychologists along with other professionals organise their work and life in a variety of ways including integration, segmentation and maintaining clear boundaries (Hoff, Grote, Dettmer, Hohner & Olos, 2005).

Job satisfaction research that considers the interface between practitioners and the organisation for which they work is of particular relevance to this study. Twenty clinical supervisors of school psychologists in New York State took part in a focus group study designed to consider how they made sense of and coped with the stressful elements of their work environment. The results demonstrated that many felt there was a pervasive organisational anti-clinical bias from higher level special education administrators. They felt this had a negative impact on job satisfaction (Breiman, 2001). However, rather than using randomly selected participants the focus group members had all completed “The Ways of Coping” checklist (Vitaliano, 1985) prior to the focus group and volunteered to take part. It is therefore possible that the participants were not representative of all clinical supervisors and that the checklist had pre-disposed them to a certain way of thinking about the issues discussed.

It has been suggested that EPs in the UK are not always viewed as relevant within organisations or seen as valuable and useful (Gersch, 2009). If this were true it would therefore have an impact for those EPs who look to gain
approbation from within the LA. It has also been suggested that in this period of rapid and immense change it is essential that EPs work to ensure that they are fully involved in changes and exert influence in setting the agenda within organisations (Gersch, 2009).

2.9.4 Summary

The literature review outlined above was carried out in the context of considering the question 'What factors influence job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation for EPs when working in multi-agency local authority contexts?' It was therefore important to explain the rationale for previous research considering job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation. There are sound reasons for researching the area, not least that the way one feels about his/her job has a direct correlation with levels of absenteeism, turnover and performance. It was then appropriate to consider each of the three areas of job satisfaction, job dissatisfaction and approbation in turn to see what research identified as predictors and barriers to each. The literature review reveals that there has been little research on approbation, job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction for EPs. Much of the research that does exist has originated from the US with an over-reliance on research questionnaires. Another gap in the existing literature appears to be a lack of consideration of the different roles that EPs/SPs are involved in. While this was discussed in relation to Principal Educational Psychologists (Male & Male, 2003) it does not appear to have been examined with regard to main grade and specialists EPs. Most of the SPs are considered as a homogenous group while EPs in the UK work in a variety of contexts with a variety of roles and responsibilities. Very little research considers the specific context in which the role of the EP is carried out.

It was also important to consider research from occupational psychology particularly that focused on organisational change. Research suggests that without full involvement in the change many employees are likely to feel demoralised, mistrustful and uninvolved. Next consideration was given to the EP profession in an attempt to highlight the role, how they fit within the current political and organisational context and their involvement with multi-agency working. This then led to a consideration of job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and
approbation for EPs. This is the first qualitative research in this area, therefore the review looked at research that most closely matched the current study and included consideration of research with other professionals working in local authority settings.

2.10 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There are a number of factors generally associated with job satisfaction and approbation. Many of these are likely to be impacted by organisational change. EPs are a highly skilled and distinctive group within Children’s Services responsible for performing a variety of functions, roles and practices. However, no previous qualitative studies have considered job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation for this profession in the UK or linked this to the impact of major changes in the ways that local authorities organise and deliver services.

The key research question for this study is ‘What factors influence job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation for EPs when working in the multi-agency context of local authorities?’ In order to answer this overarching question, four sub questions are posed:

1. What do EPs working for local authorities perceive as contributing to their job satisfaction?
2. What do EPs working for local authorities perceive as contributing to their job dissatisfaction?
3. How do EPs working for local authorities get approbation?
4. How is the re-organisation of local authorities affecting EP job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter commences with a description of the philosophical thinking behind the research broken down into ontological, epistemological and axiological considerations. A rationale for the theoretical framework chosen which makes use of both a social constructionism stance and the employment of the person centred approach is provided. The qualitative design framework uses a combination of focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Details will be
provided of the procedure employed to recruit participants into the study, carry out a pilot, create questions and conduct the research. In outlining the methods, consideration will also be given to contingency arrangements, strengths and limitations of the research methods and how trustworthiness and credibility were incorporated into the research. Details will also be provided of how the data was analysed using thematic analysis. This will include the coding method used to identify both meta (superordinate) and secondary (subordinate) themes. This chapter will conclude with an explanation of the ethical considerations given to the project and details of University approval for the project.

The aim of this research is to bridge the gap between studies concerned with EPs roles within LAs and general research around job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation for professionals. Thematic analysis was used to examine the data from a combination of focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The primary goal of focus groups is to use interaction data resulting from discussion among participants to increase the depth of the inquiry and unveil aspects of the phenomenon assumed to be otherwise less accessible (Morgan, 1988). The primary goal of interviews is often similar. However as the interaction is between interviewer and interviewee rather than a group the approach must differ to some extent. Goals of both approaches may include eliciting a description of events, meaning of actions, analysis of narrative, or something else. Therefore, the researcher must be constantly attuned to what s/he is doing and why. Interviews are not just a means by which to collect data but a place where knowledge is created, and continues to be created throughout the process (Riley, 2010).

3.2 Philosophical Considerations

A number of philosophical considerations were made in researching this topic. These include ontological, epistemological and axiological.

3.2.1 Ontological considerations

Ontology concerns the nature of reality and the tension between subjectivity verses objectivity. The researcher is drawn to social constructionism (Burr, 1995) believing that many aspects of our everyday experience are the
consequence of implicit social agreement, institutional practices or collective social action rather than objective reality. This research tries to understand people’s views at a particular and specific point in time when realities are being renegotiated and reconstructed.

3.2.2 Epistemological considerations

Epistemology refers to what we regard as knowledge or evidence of things in the social world (Mason, 1996). It is inevitable that data gained from interviews will highlight contradictions and inconsistency. This is because people are fluid and influenced by the world around them. This may be viewed as problematic when conducting quantitative research. However, if one believes that attitudes and views are socially constructed and shaped and re-shaped over time, then it could be argued that such findings demonstrate the ongoing joint construction of views. This is the epistemological stance of the research and is compatible with the collection of data from both focus groups and one to one interviews.

3.2.3 Axiological considerations

Axiology refers to the philosophical study of value. Therefore in considering axiology the researcher reflected upon the role of his values in the research. This was of particular concern because it is recognised that it can be unhelpful for the researcher to come from within the group which s/he is studying. It has been suggested that if the researcher shares too many of the group’s taken for granted assumptions s/he is unlikely to be able to expose these to critical scrutiny (Barbour, 2007). However, it is felt that this observation is partly offset by the researcher still being in the early process of entering the profession under study when the research was carried out. Also the awareness of this danger enabled reflection upon the potential for colluding with participant views.

The researcher is aware that he comes from a humanistic psychology background and is strongly influenced by the work of a number of psychologists and psychotherapists including Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and Eugene Gendlin. The research holds a number of the values from this tradition including a belief that people strive towards self actualisation, that we behave in conjunction with our self-concept and that all behaviour is goal directed. This
personal axiology was influential in the choice of subject matter, the methods of
data collection and inevitably the interpretation.

3.3 Theoretical framework

3.3.1 Theoretical approaches employed

This research project is based upon a social constructionism framework (Burr,
1995) and central aspects of Carl Rogers’ classical person centred approach
(Rogers & Wood, 1974). Social constructionism allows us to make sense and
give meaning to our world. Our ideas and attitudes are informed by our
interaction with the particular social and cultural context in which we exist
(Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 2003). It is within this framework that the researcher
sought to understand how EPs construct their realities, ideas, attitudes and
responses to job satisfaction and approbation in the organisational context in
which they work.

3.3.2 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a theory of knowledge closely linked with the theories
of Vygotsky and Bruner. A central tenant of the theory is that social phenomena
develop in social contexts. A social construct is viewed as a concept of a
particular group. Therefore, it is seen as emerging over time as an abstract
product rather than being present as a fully formed concrete object. As such a
social construct may act as the reference point for inferred beliefs, expectations,
behaviours, boundaries and norms. Social constructionism is a way of making
sense of various aspects of society including groups, institutions, generations,
culture and tradition. The social construction of reality is viewed as dynamic
and constantly changing. Therefore, as social abstractions are best
understood through the experiences of those whose work is built upon them,
social constructionism is an appropriate lens to look through for this thesis.

Social constructionism involves taking a critical stance towards assumed
knowledge. The approach cautions us to be constantly vigilant about our
assumptions about the world we encounter. It views the current perspectives
and meanings as ever changing and specific to the culture and period in history
in which they are situated. It also assumes that knowledge is sustained by
social processes. This means that our common ways of understanding the world are constructed through interaction and social process. It also assumes that social interaction and knowledge are intertwined and that each construction of phenomena is likely to produce a different kind of action for those who engage with it. Therefore, descriptions of constructions of phenomena exclude some patterns of social interaction while sustaining others.

Social constructionism has been employed as a research approach in a number of studies considering how identity changes over time. For instance, one study considered how young people making the transition from school to work construct a professional identity and are socialised into roles (Cohen-Scali, 2003). Another study explores professional identity of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) professionals after they had commenced working more closely with individuals from other professionals (Salmon & Faris, 2006).

### 3.3.3 Person Centred Approach

The classical client/person centred theory is based on the work of Carl Rogers (Rogers & Wood, 1974). Initially Rogers’ theory was concerned with creating a therapeutic relationship with an individual. However, in his later life Rogers began working more systemically with groups and organisations using the principles he had developed in individual therapeutic work. His work on facilitating national conflict resolution resulted in a Nobel peace prize nomination. It is this “person centred approach” that was considered both when conducting the interviews and focus groups. The researcher and interview facilitator is a qualified person centred therapist and member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). While the data collection was not therapy some of the principles and techniques, namely attempting to provide core conditions (Rogers, 1957) were utilised as part of the data collection process.

Although the person centred approach has been criticised for lack of empirical support, there is now converging evidence from the positive psychology and self-determination literature that can be read as providing evidence in support of the person centred view (Patterson & Joseph, 2006). The re-emergence of the
approach, due in part to the backlash against cognitive behavioural therapy, has led to a number of recent publications in which the approach has been used as a research method (Bamaca-Colbert & Gayles, 2010; Laible, Carlo Panfile, Eye & Parker, 2010; McGuire & Barber, 2010; Oshri, 2010).

3.3.4 Core Conditions

Rogers (1957) defined three attitudinal or core conditions that he considered important in relating with others and essential in therapeutic work, namely, congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard. Congruence has been defined as honesty, transparency and an ability for the individual in the relationship to be freely and deeply themselves, with their actual experience accurately represented by their awareness of themselves (Portner, 2006). Rogers (1959) referred to empathic understanding as perceiving the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings, as if one were the person, but without ever losing the “as if” condition. It is a sensing of the client’s private world with both the client’s feelings and communications as they seem to them at that moment (Rogers, 1961). Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR) has been defined as a level of acceptance and non judgementalism that enables others to feel safe to explore negative feelings and to move into the core of his/her anxieties (Skovhold & Wood, 2001).

3.3.5 Techniques associated with the Person Centred approach

A number of skills or techniques were also employed during the data collection that are used widely by person centred therapists. These include active listening, paraphrasing, highlighting cognitive dissonance and the use of silences.

3.3.6 Active Listening

The hardest work for many interviewers is to keep quiet and to listen actively. Listening is the most important skill in interviewing (Seidman, 1991). The objective in active listening is to build up a lucid understanding of the narrator’s concern and clearly communicate interest in the speaker’s message. Active listening has a number of components. These include commenting in an
empathic manner, asking relevant questions, and verifying spoken content by means of brief summaries (Gordon, 2003).

### 3.3.7 Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing involves the interviewer restating participant’s contributions in their own words. This allows the interviewee to evaluate how closely the interpretation matches the intended meaning, demonstrates that the interviewer is listening and interested and encourages elaboration (Shumway, Chouljian & Rozewicz, 2003). Paraphrasing is done in a variety of ways including verbatim and rephrasing. However, because of the repetition of information, interviews containing paraphrasing are likely to be longer than those without the technique.

### 3.3.8 Cognitive dissonance

Another skill developed during person centred training that could be employed as part of the interviewing was attempting to highlight and gently probe possible contractions given by participants. According to cognitive dissonance theory, people tend to strive to keep their knowledge, actions and attitudes consistent (consonant). However, most people actually hold inconsistent (dissonant) behaviour and attitudes (Van Veen, Krug, Schooler & Carter, 2009). Uncovering these and offering them back to the participants in a gentle none threatening way allows individuals to consider their responses and clarify their thoughts and beliefs. For example, the researcher may use the following type of statement, “It sounds as though you feel strongly that X is not important, yet when you said X earlier it sounded as though you might not think that is always the case?” However, as data collection is not therapy it was ethically important to use this technique sparingly, consider the possible impact of highlighting cognitive dissonance in a one off session and ensure participants felt emotionally able to leave the session at the end. Use of this technique was also important for supporting internal consistency of the data.

### 3.3.9 Trust your instincts

It is important to follow hunches and instincts when interviewing others (Seidman, 1991). In doing this it is important that the interviewer is open to recognising and responding to his or her own feelings. This links closely with
cognitive dissonance as the researcher must be aware of incongruent behaviour from participants as well as themselves. For instance, the participant who talks positively about something while their body language or tone of voice suggests otherwise. While remaining ethically aware of responsibilities to the participant it is often useful for the researcher to share their own responses to the interview experience. For instance “You talked really positively about that, yet something about your tone of voice suggested that you might not feel positive about it?”

3.3.10 The use of silence

Silence was also an important part of the interview process. In some instances silences can be very constructive (Brown, 2008). Silence and speech are often defined as polar opposites. However, silence can have great communicative power and can provide space for reflection and elaboration (Acheson, 2008). Silences can affect the narration of individuals and allow them to explore issues based more on feelings rather than analysis and cognition (Sakuramoto, 2009). The researcher wished to capture something of the phenomenology related to job satisfaction and approbation for EPs, however, felt it was important to ensure that space was provided for full contributions. This was seen as more relevant to individual interviews then focus groups. Silence in groups can be very powerful (Soysal, Bodur & Hizli, 2005). However, these were one off sessions without therapeutic intentions and in which silences were not negotiated. Therefore, it would be difficult to facilitate the group or cover all required areas if it were employed to any large degree as part of focus groups.

3.4 Methodological framework

It would be unreasonable to expect researchers working in educational contexts to attempt to imitate the natural sciences because the subjects of inquiry are different to natural sciences. People are complex, changeable and sometimes unpredictable, unlike an inanimate object. Therefore, trying to apply the same criteria to human participants as one would to a natural science subject is problematic. It has been suggested that if people are given the chance to talk freely, they actually know quite a lot about what is going on (Bertaux, 1981). A combination of focus group and individual interviews were used to collect data
for this thesis. There are no hard and fast rules that determine whether focus groups or one to one interviews are most appropriate and the decision should be based upon the pros and cons of each (Barbour, 2007). One consideration in making such a decision is related to the impact of perceived power imbalance between participants and how this may affect participant disclosure (Barbour, 2007).

3.4.1 Qualitative method employed in this study

The project employed a qualitative method to enable the researcher to explore deep and rich information (Mouton & Marais, 1990) emerging from shared and individual concepts and perceptions (Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). Qualitative research is defined as “an inductive process of building from the data to broad themes to a generalised model or theory” (Creswell, 2003, p. 132). Qualitative research allows for the unanticipated responses of participants by enabling free description instead of confining individuals to items on a survey (Sandelowski, 2000). It is grounded in a philosophical position concerned broadly with how the social world is understood, experienced, interpreted or produced (Mason, 1996). Quantitative methods use measuring instruments such as questionnaires to produce wide objective statistical data that answers different types of questions (Creswell, 2003). While it would be possible to study this topic using quantitative methods the researcher was interested in acquiring a rich, experiential and phenomenological insight into satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation in the current context. The lack of previous research in this area, plus the changing context, provided the rationale for an exploratory study aimed at gaining rich description. Hence, the qualitative method is more suited to the research focus of this project. The research is an exploratory survey aimed at affording the researcher the opportunity to facilitate the emerging of deep and rich descriptions by EPs of their perceptions of job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation that would otherwise have gone unexamined.

3.4.2 Focus Groups & Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews and focus group discussions were used for the data collection process. Focus groups are an increasingly popular method for collecting
qualitative data in the social sciences (Barbour, 2007). Interviews and focus groups are very flexible methods for data collection. Rather than feeling that the interviewer can be viewed as having a negative impact on the process it has been argued that the interviewer can be an adaptable, flexible instrument who can respond to situations with skill, tact, and understanding (Riley, 2010).

Data for the maingrade EPs was collected via both focus groups and individual interviews. There are a number of advantages to using mixed methods in this way. For instance, both rely on interactions with others in order to ascertain views and use a flexible approach to data gathering. The facilitator and the questions were the same for both approaches; therefore a degree of consistency to the experiences could be claimed. It is also possible that the interviews may give voice to those EPs who feel less comfortable in group situations.

However, there are a number of potential disadvantages to collecting data via two methods which must be acknowledged. For instance, the different interpersonal dynamics between the two collection methods may impact upon the answers provided by participants. Also, the individual interviews may provide opportunity for more detailed answers hence potentially skewing the analysis if this is not accounted for. It could also be argued that the individual interviews are a more formal arrangement and hence the data is likely to be more prescribed.

Although mixed methods were used to collect data from maingrade EPs it was felt that there was valid justification for this. It has been argued that the researcher can capitalize on the comparative potential of various datasets and that it affords an alternative lens through which to look at the issues at hand (Barbour, 2007). Also having an awareness of the potential advantages and disadvantages to combining the data enabled the researcher to be mindful of the data source during the analysis.

There is no one right way to do focus groups. Instead, there are many alternatives, and it is up to the researcher to select a set of options that are appropriate for any given project (Morgan, 1988). Focus groups may be defined as a particular form of group interview intended to exploit group dynamics. The
primary goal of this method is to use interaction data resulting from discussion among participants to increase the depth of the inquiry and unveil aspects of the phenomenon assumed to be otherwise less accessible. While qualitative research may be broadly characterized as concerned with exploring people’s lived experiences and perspectives in context, focus groups are a heterogeneous field incorporating many theoretical traditions (Freeman, 2006).

Actual focus groups themselves though are typically based on homogeneous groups (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2001). In a focus group environment it is accepted and often desired that participants influence each other in relation to their perceptions, feelings, and thinking about particular issues (Krueger & Casey, 2000). People make meaning of situations, and meanings are typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons (Creswell, 2003). Hence, using focus groups allowed data to emerge about job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation.

Semi-structured interviews were also used for part of the data collection process. Interviewing is not concerned primarily with answering questions, testing hypothesis or evaluating. It is about gaining an understanding of the lived experience of the other and how they make sense of that (Seidman, 1991). The objective of semi-structured interviews is therefore to gain an accurate uninhibited account based on participant’s personal knowledge and experience.

The use of semi-structured interviews enabled the interviewer to pursue relevant aspects that emerge as part of the process. They allow participants to express and contextualise their true feelings, rather than feeling constrained with an inflexible line of questioning that gives no opportunity for contextual explanations (Kitchin, 2000). Semi-structured interviews aim to allow the interviewee flexibility, and participants the ability to contribute their own line of thought (Thomas, Walker & Webb, 1998).

A number of basic assumptions underlie the techniques required for interviewing. For instance, the interviewer must focus on the other, keep their ego in check and give both verbal and non verbal cues that the interviewees answers are important (Seidman, 1991).
As with any research methods a number of limitations and issues are inherent in the use of both focus groups and interviews. Focus groups offer flexibility and can thus be used in many contexts. This however can give rise to confusion as researchers coming from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds with differing axiology or epistemology will inevitably approach focus groups in different ways and with differing perspectives. Therefore, it has become difficult to find a robust definition of a focus group and a variety of terms including “group discussion”, “group interview” and “focus group interview” are used interchangeably (Barbour, 2007).

Focus groups stimulate discussion and it could therefore be argued that they have the potential to be cathartic. However, it is important that the researcher has an awareness of the potential impact of carrying out focus groups. For participants for whom situational freedoms are limited the focus group may potentially give rise to an awareness of the structural constraints in which they operate. While such realisations are potentially positive it would be ethically unsound for a researcher to facilitate discussions highlighting personal constraints without taking responsibility for the potential impact this knowledge may have.

The objectivity of focus groups and semi-structured interviews can be affected by the attitudes of the participants as they are by definition self reports. It is possible that participants may wish to present themselves to the researcher and other participants in a socially desirable way. Each participant in this study will hold their own particular socially constructed idea of what an EP professional means. They may feel pressured to present their answers as professionals rather than individuals. This may limit them to giving responses that they feel are politically correct, likely to gain approval from peers, or help them maintain a professional identity. These factors may distort the accuracy of their self-reporting.
3.4.3 Thematic Analysis

Creswell (2003) states that:

“The researcher begins by gathering detailed information from participants and forms this information into categories or themes. These themes or categories are developed into broad patterns, theories, or generalisations that are then compared with personal experiences or with existing literature on the topic.” (p.132)

The process used in this research is outlined in detail in section 3.8.3. However, it is worth considering why two other qualitative methods were not chosen. One method that was considered was Grounded Theory. Grounded Theory is a systematic method for generating theory from data. One of the goals of Grounded Theory is to explain people’s actions regardless of time and place (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, this study was concerned with situating the research within the very specific context of LAs undergoing transition. It has also been suggested that the researcher using Grounded Theory should not carry out a literature review prior to conducting the research (Glaser, 1995). There are pragmatic reasons why this would have been difficult. For instance, there was a requirement to demonstrate a gap in the literature prior to gaining university agreement that the research could be undertaken.

A second method considered was Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). As the researcher has a background in humanistic psychology and an interest in experiential psychology the potential use of IPA was carefully considered. One of the aims of IPA is to explain how a person situated in a particular context makes sense of the phenomenon. It therefore takes account of the experience and personal interpretation the individual places upon the phenomenon when making sense of it. IPA was eventually discounted because the researcher was also from within the profession under study. An important element of IPA is that the researcher attempts to suspend their own preconceptions about the data. While this is true of most qualitative methods it is perhaps more important in IPA given that there is an understanding that the data will be interpreted. The researcher felt that their lack of distance from the
phenomenon under study made it difficult and perhaps inappropriate for an interpretation of the data to form part of this study.

3.5 Research methods

![Research Methodology Diagram]

**Figure 3.1 Research Methodology**

3.5.1 Data collection contingencies

The aim of data collection was to carry out five semi-structured interviews with EP team managers and five focus groups with main grade EPs across three authorities. However, it was anticipated that it may prove difficult to assemble enough EPs at a mutually convenient time to carry out all five focus groups. At the University thesis panel it was therefore agreed that two individual interviews with team members could take the place of a focus group if necessary.

Rather than randomly recruiting LAs an effort was made to recruit three LAs with contrasting structures. However, it was also anticipated that it may prove difficult to recruit contrasting EPSs or teams to the study. This was due to a variety of factors including current service delivery commitments, ongoing
organisational change and short timescales. It was therefore agreed that the study could still take place providing three North West LAs participated.

3.5.2 Recruiting Local Authorities

Three local authorities in the North West of England were recruited to take part in the research including the one in which the researcher was employed. This authority is one of the largest in the country and is split into a number of areas each with its own local EP team. EPSs in the North West are structured in a variety of ways. For instance, some work as a central service, some are organised into a number of teams, others work within co-located teams and a number have team members whose role is split between the EPS and multi-agency teams. Some services are headed by principal EPs while others have alternative management arrangements.

A list of EPS managers’ email addresses for local authorities in the North West was initially compiled together with an indication of the organisational structure for each. In order to compile this list, the researcher spoke to a number of EPs across the North West most of who had links with the University EP training course. Following this, an email was sent to the managers of the first two authorities that have alternative structures to the commissioning LA. This email invited the EPS to take part in the research, broadly outlining the requirements and requesting a reply within two weeks (Appendix A). If they declined or did not reply within the two weeks then an email was sent to the next manager on the list. This process was repeated until three LAs had been recruited to participate in the research. When researchers try to contact potential participants whom they do not know, they often face gatekeepers who control access to those people (Seidman, 1991). There can be many valid reasons for this including a concern for the safety of the individuals, belief that the research may divert resources, highlight uncomfortable truths, be practically difficult to arrange or lead to access to intellectual property and confidential information.

Based upon this method of recruitment five local authorities declined. Three felt they could not agree the time needed for the research due to other commitments. Two were in the process of moving offices and therefore did not feel they were able to commit to involvement within the required timescales. In
all cases, however, feedback suggested that most felt that the research was in an area of importance to EPs. In one of the authorities the principal declined involvement on behalf of the service. However, a number of EPs let it be known to the researcher via a student colleague working in the service that they were willing to give up their own time to participate due to feeling strongly about the topic. As the authority had declined an official request for involvement it was deemed unethical to pursue the offer from individual EPs within it. However, two other LAs did agree to take part in the research. Unfortunately, due to the difficulties recruiting authorities it was not possible to choose authorities with vastly different recruiting ways of working and organising themselves.

All three EPSs were at the time of writing under the management of a Principal Educational Psychologist. Of the three authorities who agreed to participate, one was in the process of negotiating changes from an EPS into a more generic service that includes other professions in the authority who work directly with children in schools. This authority had also begun a traded services team into which EPs were given the opportunity to voluntarily join. The second authority was part of an integrated Children’s Services but reported uncertainty over whether or not this arrangement would continue. EPs in this service were based in co-located offices but were not organised into co-located teams although they felt this was probable. The third EPS was also part of Children’s Services within the authority. However, they worked as an EPS in their own right with service level agreements directly to schools. Many of the EPs in the team also had some responsibilities in multi-agency teams focused on both social care and health.

3.5.3 Recruiting Individuals

Once acknowledgement that the EPS might be willing to participate in the research had been given, a second email was sent to the manager of the service. This requested that the team manager distributed a letter to all EPs in the team on behalf of the researcher. This letter informed the EPs of the nature and purpose of the research (Appendix B). It is important to present the nature of the study in as broad a context as possible and to be explicit about what will be expected of the participant (Seidman, 1991). The letter also explained that
the researcher would as part of the project meet with the team manager separately to help provide context for the service. It also stated that all data collected from the service would be anonymised, confidential, objective and would not be shared directly with the service or their managers. The letter requested participation in a 45 minutes focus group at a mutually convenient date and time. Recipients of the letter were requested to email the researcher without obligation to express a willingness to take part.

3.5.4 Participants

It was deemed important to gain a team manager perspective to help contextualise how the EP team fitted within the local authority. Therefore prior to collecting data from team managers they were asked the following questions.

1. Please can you briefly explain how your team is located within the wider context of your directorate and authority?
2. How long has the current organisational structure been in operation and are you aware of any anticipated changes that are likely to impact on your team?

Qualitative data can never fully capture the subjective experience of the participants but contextualising it enables a closer representation. For instance, imagine after a bricklayer has completed building a wall a researcher interviewed them about their job. The data would be richer if the context in which the bricklayer worked was understood. Did the bricklayer build the wall because it would earn them money, because it would protect against the wind, was it done as part of a training exercise or was it part of a larger building being built by a team of which they were a member? Such contextual information enables the researcher to get closer to the phenomenology of the interviewee.

From the responses received 27 participants were recruited to the study. In order to protect participant anonymity demographic information was restricted to gender, age, grade of participant and number of years qualified. Of those agreeing to take part 16 were female and 11 were male. The age of participants ranged from 24 to 58. The length of time EPs had been in service ranged from a few months to over twenty years.
Table 3.1: Research Participants

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Total Participants 27

3.5.5 Rationale for using combined methods

Interviews with team managers were carried out separately to the focus groups as it was felt that including those with management responsibility in the focus groups may inhibit the free expression of views from main grade EPs. It was also decided that the focus group participants should all be main grade or specialist EPs with no management responsibility. This was done to encourage freedom of expression by all members in the group particularly with regard to perceived approbation from supervisors and those in managerial roles. It was felt that if any EPs in the group had line management or supervisory roles for other members this may impact negatively on the dynamics of the group.

3.5.6 Pilot Study

The unanticipated experience of the interviewing process and the complexities of the interviewing relationship deserve exploration before the researcher begins their projects (Seidman, 1991). By carrying out a pilot study the researcher was able to gain a better sense of the appropriateness of the research questions. It also alerted the researcher to elements of his own interview techniques that support the objectives of the study and those that detract from them. After the pilot the researcher was able to step back, reflect on the experience and revise the research approach based upon what was learned.
The term *pilot study* can refer to feasibility studies which are trial runs, done in preparation for the major study (Polit, Beck & Hungler, 2001) or a pre-test or “trying out” of a particular research instrument (Baker, 1994). For this study, it was anticipated that the pilot study would meet both of these criteria. The pilot was an opportunity to test the practicalities of running a focus group at the offices of the participants. It was also an opportunity to ask participants for feedback, to identify ambiguities and check timings. It was important to consider the potential of contamination as the pilot study data was included in the main results. Quantitative researchers have argued that an essential feature of a pilot study is that the data are not included with data from the actual study when the results are reported (Peat, Mellis, Williams & Xuan, 2002). However, it is recognised that in qualitative research such data may be of value, particularly if the modifications arising from the pilot are minimum. It is acceptable to view data collection as progressive. Some have therefore argued that in qualitative approaches separate pilot studies are not necessary (Holloway, 1997). Modifications following the pilot were small, participant recruitment came from a potentially small participant pool and it was felt important to ensure there was no opportunity for practice effect. Therefore the data from the pilot was included in the main study.

The first interview and focus group acted as a pilot study. Questions and areas of discussion for subsequent manager interviews and focus groups were amended based upon this pilot. One of the aims of the pilot study was to enable participants to generate areas for future exploration. The first question asked in both the pilot interview and focus group was:

> “If you were conducting research on Educational Psychologists’ views of factors that influence approbation, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction when working within multi-agency local authority contexts, what questions would you ask?”

Answers were explored in detail before asking the question “Is there anything else you would ask?” This question was repeated until participants could not think of anything else. This led to the compilation of a list of questions generated by the group. Next, these generated questions were asked of the
participants. For instance, one area of discussion was work/life balance. Therefore, the participants were asked what their views were on work/life balance for EPs. After the self generated areas had been explored any research questions that had not already been asked were put to the participants. From the pilot a number of areas of discussion emerged. These included “work/life balance”, “specific expertise” and “relationship with others”. An attempt was then made to incorporate these areas of discussion into the subsequent questions asked in the remaining data collection sessions. It has been suggested that if the pilot study works then it can become your first group, if it does not then lessons are learned and it remains as a pilot study (Morgan, Krueger & King, 1998). The pilot study generated the areas for subsequent discussion and these areas were also explored in the pilot. Therefore, they provided consistency with subsequent interviews and were treated as data collection sessions in their own right.

It was decided to restrict the number of questions asked to enable time to explore each in detail. The questions most used in an in-depth interview follow from what the participant has said (Seidman, 1991). It was also deemed appropriate to ask the same set of questions in both the focus groups and interviews as this would provide a degree of consistency in the data collection and the questions seemed equally relevant to both forums. The list of questions generated from the pilot study was checked with a colleague who is also an EP. Questions should be reviewed by people similar to your target audience to make sure the language is clear (Morgan, Krueger & King, 1998). Effective questions are clear, brief, one dimensional and jargon free (Morgan, Krueger & King, 1998). Morgan’s (1988) principles for developing questions for focus groups were adhered to in creating the wording of the questions. The set of questions is presented in the next section.

### 3.5.7 Generated Questions

When the data collection sessions commenced the participants were initially verbally presented with the definitions of firstly job satisfaction, followed by job dissatisfaction and then approbation contained in section 2.1.1. In each case they were given the opportunity to clarify or challenge the definitions. This
resulted in a number of participants discussing what the terms meant personally for them with this information forming part of the analysed data. Following this the questions were asked.

Preliminary question: If you were conducting research on Educational Psychologists’ views of factors that influence approbation, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction when working within a multi-agency local authority context, what questions would you ask?”

1. What gives you job satisfaction?
2. What if anything do you find dissatisfying about your job?
3. How do EPs get recognition and appreciation for their work?
4. How has the re-organisation of local authorities impacted on your job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation?
5. How is the specific expertise and knowledge of EPs recognised and used within your authority?
6. What impact if any has legislation from the past decade had on your practice and perceived job satisfaction?
7. What are your views on work/life balance for EPs?
8. How do you feel those you work with/for perceive EPs?
9. What impact do the perceptions of others have on your job?
10. What impact if any has multi-agency working had on working as an EP?

In all data collection sessions the questions were asked in the order presented above. Participant answers were paraphrased to demonstrate that the researcher had listened to the response and encourage expansion. If the participants felt their answer had not been accurately reflected it also provided the opportunity for clarification. The objective was to encourage discussion without introducing the personal views of the interviewer.
3.5.8 Data collection arrangements

The team manager of the participating services was requested to agree a mutual date and time for a 45 minute interview. The intention of these interviews was to help contextualise the issues from a service level within each participating authority and gain a management perspective. All managers were experienced EPs who still spent part of their week on casework. Therefore, it was felt that their perspective would be a useful addition to the dataset. They were also requested to make arrangements for time be set aside during a future team meeting, personal development meeting or other convenient time when a substantial number of EPs would be required to convene. At the agreed time focus groups were facilitated with the participating EPs. If fewer than four EPs had expressed a willingness to participate in a focus group, arrangements to carry out individual interviews were made directly with the EPs who were willing to participate. This resulted in four individual interviews with main grade EPs in place of two focus groups.

The three focus groups, five team manager and four main grade interviews were conducted over a period of four months between May and August 2010. These took place at the EPS offices of all participating authorities. These locations were selected due to their accessibility and convenience for participants, plus the surroundings were familiar to those involved. Every step the researcher takes to ease the logistics of the process is a step towards allowing the available energy to be focused on the interviews themselves (Seidman, 1991). The focus groups were conducted at a variety of times and on different days of the week. It was felt that it was important that the different EP teams involved had the flexibility to determine when would be the most convenient for them. This was to ensure that a large enough number of participants would be available to participate. The focus groups consisted of six, six and six participants giving a total of 18 focus group participants. Two focus groups took place in large meeting rooms with participants sat together around a table. One took place in a staff meeting room that was made private for the duration. Here participants sat on comfortable settees around a coffee table. The five interviews with managers all took place in their individual offices and the four interviews with EPs all took place in individual offices that were
made private for the duration. Audio recordings of the focus groups were collected for later transcription rather than taking notes as it was felt this may detract from facilitating the discussion.

### 3.5.9 Conducting the focus groups

It has been suggested that there a number of aspects that must be considered when conducting focus group interview. These include ensuring that important topics are covered and that the data is as precise as possible. They also include encouraging communication that explores the participants' feelings in some depth and taking into account the background in which the participants generate their responses (Morgan, 1988).

Each focus group began with an introduction from the facilitator. An explanation was given as to the purpose of the research, levels of confidentiality and anonymity, agreement of ground rules, areas for discussion, timeframes, definition of key terms and options for choosing not to participate and keeping oneself safe. Other areas discussed included what would happen with the data and access to the finished thesis. All participants signed consent forms (Appendix D) to show that they were willing to be audio recorded. The Health Professions Council standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists (HPC, 2009, p.7) states that psychologists must “understand the importance of and be able to obtain informed consent”. This applies to all activities they may be involved in including research.

It has been suggested that there are a number of participant “types” who exhibit behaviours that can be a challenge in focus groups. These include experts and influentials, dominant talkers, disruptive participants, ramblers and wanderers, quiet and shy participants and inattentive participants (Morgan, Krueger & King, 1998). A number of techniques were available should any challenging behaviour be encountered in a sessions. For instance, the researcher could refer to the ground rules, use body language, invite responses directly or use individuals' names.

All participants attending the focus group contributed to the discussion. At the end of each focus group, the facilitator summarised the discussion to provide
the participants with the opportunity to comment. All sessions were conducted in the same way and the researcher followed Morgan’s (1988) guidelines for conducting focus groups. Before leaving, members were provided with the researcher’s email address and asked to email any other comments they felt may be relevant. Two short emails were received from participants after the data collection but neither included details that they wished to be added to the data set. Positive comments on the benefit of the group process were made by several participants. All said they enjoyed the experience and there was general agreement that it was an area that needed more discussion within the profession.

3.5.10 Conducting the interviews

Five semi-structured interviews took place with team leaders who were all experienced Senior Educational Psychologists. In three cases these took place immediately after the focus groups. One was organised separately and the other took place following individual interviews with two members of the manager’s team. These interviews took place at the offices of the participants at a time convenient for them.

Four individual interviews also took place with main grade EPs. This was a contingency arrangement that had been agreed if it proved difficult to gain enough participants to undertake enough focus groups. Justification for combining the data is provided in section 3.4.2. Two of the interviews were with main grade EPs both of whom had been working as EPs for 10 years or more. The other two interviews took place with specialist EPs both of whom had also been working as EPs for over 10 years. One had been working as a specialist for seven years and the other for five years. In all cases these interviews also took place at private rooms at the offices in which the participants were based.

Each interview began with an introduction from the facilitator. An explanation was given as to the purpose of the research, levels of confidentiality and anonymity, areas for discussion, timeframes and options for choosing not to participate and keeping oneself safe. Other areas discussed included what would happen with the data and access to the finished thesis. All participants
signed consent forms (Appendix D) to show that they were willing to be audio recorded.

3.6 Procedure

The focus group and interviews were digitally audio-recorded, and conducted in English. The duration of each data collection session was about 45 minutes. However, one focus group only lasted 30 minutes. This was because the time was allocated at the end of a team meeting in which some of the items had over run. As there would be very little chance of easily arranging another date for the interview it was decided to try to condense the focus group into 30 minutes. In this instant the participants were also sent an email of the questions and invited to expand on answers they had given if they so wished. This resulted in two emails with extra details. These were added to the dataset and analysed in the same way as the data from the focus group.

In each session the researcher restated the purpose of the research and explained the procedure. The researcher also asked the questions and facilitated the discussions. All participants were also requested to sign a consent form that they were happy for the sessions to be recorded and the data used for research purposes. Participants were informed that the audio recording would be transcribed, analysed, member checked then deleted. They were ensured that anonymity would be maintained at all times. All participants were informed of the approval given to conduct the research from the University Research Ethics Committee. All data was transferred onto a personal computer and a full written transcript of each session was created using Dragon NaturallySpeaking Professional software V10. Transcripts adhered to participants’ grammar, pauses, place holders, and unfinished sentences but have been edited in some cases to be more understandable to the reader. For instance changing “that provides it for me” to “that provides [job satisfaction] for me”.


3.7 Trustworthiness and credibility

A number of frameworks exist for ensuring rigour in qualitative research. The researcher has attempted to satisfy four criteria (Guba, 1981) proposed as a qualitative research framework, namely:

- Credibility (in preference to internal validity). Credibility refers to an attempt to demonstrate that an honest picture of the studied phenomenon is being presented. For example, the researcher sent the analysed thematic data back to participants for a member check.

- Transferability (in preference to external validity/generalisability). Transferability refers to providing sufficient detail of the context to enable the reader to be able to decide if the research is applicable only to the environment under study or can be generalised to other settings. For example, the researcher explained the criteria for participant selection and the rationale for this and used interviews with managers to add contextual detail.

- Dependability (in preference to reliability). Dependability is difficult to achieve in qualitative work, however, the researcher should work to attempt to enable further researchers to repeat the study. For example, details are provided of the specific group from which participants were recruited plus details of where the data collection took place.

- Confirmability (in preference to objectivity). Confirmability refers to ensuring that steps are taken to show that findings emerge from data and not personal perspectives. For example, adding each individual quote to unnamed themes before selecting quotes that shared similarities. Only when a number of quotes with similarities were present was a temporary name given to them. This name was then amended as further quotes were added until a “theme” that described the data had emerged.

As can be seen the four criteria attempt to map onto terms used in positivist research. However, it is noted that a number of commentators would argue that there is no formulaic way in which qualitative research should be conducted (Lyons & Coyle, 2007).
3.7.1 Triangulation & member check

Credible research produces findings that are convincing and believable (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Therefore a process was followed that, according to Krueger and Casey (2000), would ensure trustworthy results and an accurate reflection of how the participants felt and thought about the topic researched. People behave differently depending upon the contexts, therefore it can be argued that qualitative methods ensure dependability of the findings as the data is recorded as it happens. However, as this raw data is then categorised into themes a procedure is needed to ensure that the accuracy is not compromised by this process. This was ensured through a process called member checking (Creswell, 2003). For this project it meant that the transcribed dialogue from a particular session was thematically organised. The thematic data was then emailed back to the participant as an attached word file in order for them to ensure that it was an accurate reflection of the original discussion. Participants were requested to check the file and email back any comments if possible within two weeks. They were told that should they not reply to the email it would be assumed that they felt the thematic data was an accurate reflection of the data collection session.

Five replies were received to this request. A selection of comments made include:

“the quotes seem to fit under the initial themes.....”

“the 11 categories are really interesting, though I wonder about the distinction between them.....How does Feedback differ from Others’ Perceptions.....”

“I have checked it thoroughly and it’s fine......”

“I remember saying some of those things.......”

“Interesting reading. I have added a couple of comments in black on the attached version.......”

As can be seen, two of the replies referred to issues that the participants had with the initial thematic analysis. One of these resulted in a phone call to the participant and a talk through of the themes. From this it was agreed that some of the quotes under the section “Feedback” should move to the theme “Others’ Perceptions”. The second participant’s comments provided clarification to two
comments she had said in the interview. These did not result in any changes to the data set.

3.8 Analysis of data

3.8.1 Transcription of interviews and focus group discussion

The audio recording from the interviews and focus groups were transferred via a Universal Serial Bus (USB) port onto a laptop computer as Waveform Audio File (WAV) files. These were listened to through headphones at half the normal speed using Windows Media Player. The dialogue being listened to was spoken into a microphone attached to a second laptop. The second laptop was running Dragon Naturally Speaking Preferred V10 with a Microsoft Word active window. This allowed for a full transcription of the data to be created in a Microsoft Word document. Each data set was saved in a predefined “initial transcribed data” directory using a naming format of F/M/I/I for Focus group, Manager Interview or main grade Interview, 1a, 1b, 2, to identify the local authority and the date of the recording. For instance, one file was named F1b-120510 indicating that it was the second focus group in the first authority and took place on the 12th May 2010. Each individual being interviewed was also assigned a code. For instance P1 would indicate participant 1 and P2 would indicate participant 2. Therefore a code of F2.P2 against a quote would indicate that the comment was assigned to participant two in focus group two. Likewise a code of MI3 would indicate that the quote had been made during the 3rd manager interview.
Table 3.2  Data files and codes

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</table>

3.8.2 Correcting the initial transcript

Dragon Naturally Speaking software transcribed the data. However, the software is not 100% accurate in recognised words e.g. typing “Miss Take” for “mistake”. Therefore, before analysing the transcribed data, each transcript was read twice by the researcher and corrections made. This ensured that it was accurate and enabled the researcher to gain a good overview and familiarity with the data. At the same time the audio recording was listened to again to ensure reliability. Following this the data was moved into a directory “final transcribed data”.

3.8.3 Considerations in using Thematic Analysis

Qualitative research methods are often divided into two frameworks: those dependent on a theoretical or epistemological position and those from a broader or less dependent theoretical position (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The types of
analyses which are tied to a theoretical position may be restricted in how they are performed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These include interpretative phenomenological analysis, conversation analysis, grounded theory, discourse analysis, and narrative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a qualitative method independent of theory thereby giving it flexibility for a wide range of uses (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting the patterns or themes within the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

“Thematic analysis is a way of seeing. Often, what one sees through thematic analysis does not appear to others, even if they are observing the same information, events, or situations. To others, if they agree with the insights, it appears visionary. If they disagree with the insights, it appears delusional. Observation precedes understanding. Recognising an important moment (seeing) precedes encoding it (seeing it as something), which in turn precedes interpretation. Thematic analysis moves you through these three phases of inquiry” (Boyatzis, 1998, p.46).

This method is often used when attempting to research in an area where the views of participants are not well documented. With thematic analysis a theme is defined as capturing or representing a patterned response or meaning within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, it is important not to presume that repetition of a theme means it is more critical to understanding the topic than other themes. There is no established rule suggesting that an idea has to be displayed a certain percentage of times in the data for it to be considered a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, it is essential for a theme to capture something important to answering the overall research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher takes an active role when analyzing the data. Researcher judgement is necessary to determine themes and therefore flexibility and engagement with the data is more important than attempting to follow rigid rules (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
3.8.4 Appropriateness for this study

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data using the six phases of thematic analysis (Appendix E) together with the 15 point checklist (Appendix F) for good thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It has been argued that thematic analysis is the first qualitative method of analysis that researchers should learn, as it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As data collection was via a combination of focus group and interview a method of analysis applicable to both was required. Thematizing meanings is one of a few shared generic skills across qualitative analysis (Holloway & Todres, 2003). It is independent of epistemology and therefore the method reduced theoretical bias and offers the flexibility for the researcher to approach it as a pure research tool. For this project, the interviewer/facilitator and researcher was the same person, therefore, this was an important consideration.

3.8.5 Inductive or Deductive

There are a number of frequent mistakes and issues associated with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the researcher may use the data collection questions as themes rather than analysing the data to identify themes. Secondly, identifying themes that are too broad, with too great an overlap and little internal coherence and consistency. Thirdly, a mismatch between the data and the analytic claims made about it. If the researcher decides to undertake an interpretive approach to the data then the potential for bias and subjectivity to be introduced is increased. Likewise

"The challenge to the qualitative researcher is to use thematic analysis to draw the richness of the themes from raw information without reducing the insights to a trivial level for the sake of consistency of judgement" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 14).

An awareness of the points made above enabled full considerations of the issues during analysis. For example, once the data was captured the questions were discarded and all data recorded. This allowed the themes to emerge. Secondly, mind mapping software (see section 3.8.9) enabled the data to be
manipulated in a fluid way. This helped ensure themes were not too broad or overlapped greatly.

At this point it is worth taking a moment to discuss the overlap of themes. Braun & Clarke refer to identifying broad themes with too large an overlap as a frequent mistake in thematic analysis. While efforts were made to reduce overlaps they could not be completely eliminated. However, one of the aims of the data collection sessions was to provide conditions that encouraged fluidity and free talk. A consequence of this is that participants themselves made links between themes. While this provided richness and insight into thought processes it made it difficult to fully separate themes during the analysis. The researcher carrying out this study was also employed full time with limited time or access to other researchers. For this study it therefore proved difficult to organise a second coder to check the reliability of the coding system. However, by asking participants to carry out a member check after the initial thematic analysis it is believed this goes some way to addressing this issue. Lastly, the overlaps that do occur remain in the final analysis with good reason. For instance, the subordinate theme of “Relationships” occurs in both the themes of “Approbation” and “Job Satisfaction”. In one instance, it refers to the receiving of approbation from others and in the second it refers to the effect relationships have on individual EPs.

Before commencing with thematic analysis, researchers must decide their approach to coding. Thematic analysis is conducted using either an inductive or deductive style. If an inductive approach is performed, then data is coded without reference to a pre-existing coding system. Instead themes are determined from what is present in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When a deductive (theoretical thematic) approach is employed then coding is carried out according to existing theories or analytical interests (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In general, this type of analysis provides less a rich description of the data overall, and more a detailed analysis of some aspect of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
3.8.6 Explicit or Interpretive

After an approach to coding has been determined, it is important to assess whether or not it will be appropriate to identify themes at an explicit (semantic) or interpretative (latent) level (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Explicit themes are concerned with the surface meaning of the data while interpretative themes examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations shaping the surface theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once an approach and level to coding has been determined, the process of data analysis can begin. This process consists of phases including becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At the conclusion, the goal of this approach is to tell an overall story of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.8.7 Initial coding

All data from the interviews and focus groups were given equal attention in the coding process to ensure an inclusive and comprehensive data set was created. This was achieved by coding all data, except for questions being asked by the interviewer and initial rapport building conversation. Once the themes had been generated and the data organised around them, the recordings were listened to again to check the coded data against the original data set. Some themes had a degree of overlap, however, this was reduced by allocating comments to the dominant theme. This also helped to ensure that themes were internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.

3.8.8 Inductive and explicit

The inductive approach to thematic analysis was chosen as the appropriate method of analysis as this would capture the responses of the participants and give flexibility in generating themes. It was also deemed appropriate as there is limited previous research in this particular area. The main purpose of the inductive approach is to remove the restraints of using a structured methodology to enable findings to surface from the dominant, significant or frequent themes inherent in the raw data. Boyatzis (1998) felt that the inductive method is the most appropriate way of developing themes. While
acknowledging that using pre-existing codes or following existing theory is more
direct it also locks the researcher into any biases, assumptions or projections
inherent in the pre-existing codes or theory (Boyatzis, 1998). It was decided to
identify themes using an explicit approach. As the researcher comes from
within the profession being studied it was acknowledged that researcher bias
would be better controlled using an explicit approach. Were an interpretive
approach to be used underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations
may be contaminated by those of the researcher.

3.8.9 Identifying themes for each data set

The software used for the initial analysis of the data was Mindjet MindManager
v8. This is a commercial software application developed by Mindjet Corporation.
It enabled the user to create mind maps based upon the method developed by
Tony Buzan (Mento, Martinelli & Jones, 1999). As none of the data sets were
longer than 45 minutes in length all data from a particular set could be stored
within one mind map. Individual quotes were assigned into flexible themes that
emerged as the data was analysed. As the data was assigned the programme
allowed the flexibility for high and low level themes to be created and renamed.
Some quotes were reassigned using a “drag and drop” method as the themes
emerged. This allowed the researcher to develop a thematic map of the data.
The software allowed the researcher to capture all direct quotations.

3.8.10 Generating initial themes

There are two approaches to identifying themes. Firstly the researcher can look
for reoccurring statements or words and theme according to frequency. The
alternative approach is for the researcher to identify themes that have a
particular meaning. This second approach is more interpretive and requires
value to be attached to the statements. As already discussed the decision was
to take an inductive and explicit approach to thematic analysis. Therefore the
initial approach was taken. Once all data for a particular data set had been
assigned to themes within a mind map this was saved as a Portable Document
Format (PDF) file. An example is provided on the following page and enlarged
versions are included in Appendix H to enhance legibility.
Figure 3.2: Mindjet mindmap
The data were also converted into a word document. This conversion to a word format document also allowed for creating headings for each theme and numbered each quote within each of the headings. For example:

A **Others expectations**

A1  I4 – “but sometimes, they are able to say that they did not get what they wanted even though they were not able to say what they wanted.”

A2  F2.P3 -“We might feel that we have done a good job in moving things on but they might feel that they have not got what they wanted. I personally always ask people what their best hopes are of my involvement. I find that quite often, people have trouble answering that question.”

### 3.8.11 Member check

The data was then emailed back to each participant as a pdf and word document for a member check (Creswell, 2003). This allowed participants to check that the data was accurate but also that the interpretation of themes accurately reflected the data gathering exercise. Participants were also asked to provide feedback on the validity of the focus group process in relation to the stated aims of the research. For instance, they were asked whether the focus group setting allowed comprehensive consideration of the issues. All participants felt that the analysed data was a valid representation of the particular data gathering exercise (see section 3.7.1). It was therefore, deemed appropriate to move to the next stage of analysis.

### 3.8.12 The emergence of meta-themes

A second version of the mapped data was created. This second version was used to group quotes into two large datasets. The service manager interview data was merged into one dataset and the focus group data and non-management interviews were merged into a second file. This enabled both the focus group and interview data to be integrated into themes without losing awareness of the different contexts and participants. This was an important consideration as the length of the data collection sessions was similar for both the service manager interviews and the focus groups with main grade EPs. Therefore, management views could easily be over-represented in the final analysis of the data unless the origin of the data was maintained and a
conscious effort made to give more weight to the data from main grade EPs. By merging the various data sets based upon themes, overarching themes emerged into which all data was allocated. This also allowed the researcher to create a step by step audit trail of data from initial transcription to creation of the final meta-themes. The Health Professions Council standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists states that psychologists should “be able to maintain an effective audit trail” (HPC, 2009, p.25).

3.9 Ethical considerations and approvals

Virtuous and ethical behaviour involves doing well, whatever we do (Aristotle, 1976). As a trained therapist and member of the BACP the researcher attempted to make the experience safe for all participants. The Health Professions Council standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists states that psychologists must “recognise that they are personally responsible for and must be able to justify their decisions” (HPC, 2009, p.7). The BACP code states that practitioners ensure that the “way that they undertake their work is as safe as possible” (BACP, 2009, p.10) and that they remain committed to “protecting the safety of clients” (BACP, 2009, p.2). While recognising a distinction between research participant and therapeutic client the guidelines are applicable to practitioner researchers as well as therapists and therefore seem appropriate for conducting research focus groups and interviews.

Before starting the focus group, the researcher explained their role, the purpose of the research, duration and how the data would be used. The British Psychological Service (BPS) Ethical Framework (2006) states the psychologist should “Be honest and accurate in representing their professional affiliations and qualifications, including such matters as knowledge, skill, training, education, and experience”. The researcher informed all participants that they could leave the room at any time should they not feel comfortable with the discussion and that they could withdraw consent to participate at any point. Before commencing, a few minutes were spent agreeing ground rules with the group. These were written on a sheet of A2 paper and pinned to the wall in a position where all could see them. The rules always included respect for each
other’s views, ownership of one’s own views and opportunity for all to contribute. All participants were made fully aware of how the data would be used and were given the opportunity to receive a copy of the final report.

Although the researcher used counselling skills there was recognition that a focus group is not therapy. The researcher abided by the BPS Professional Practice Guidelines for the Division of Educational and Child Psychology (2002) and the HPC’s Standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists (2009). The thesis proposal was also approved by the University Board of Ethics. All participants were made aware that the data collected in the group would not be confidential as it would be used to compile a research report that would be shared with others. The sessions were only recorded after participants consented to this. Once the electronic audio-files had been transcribed and member checked the audio files were deleted. Transcripts and data were stored securely on a password protected sector of the researcher’s external hard drive using an industry standard software package USBCrypt from WinAbility Software. The researcher is committed to retaining the data for five years after the thesis has been published. Many of the considerations mentioned above also apply to one to one interviews. These sessions were also audio recorded and the data treated in the same way as for focus groups.

Of paramount importance in focus group research is a clear understanding of the ethics and the risks and protections that apply in this kind of scientific endeavour (Clark, 2009). At the end of each data collection exercise, the researcher therefore devoted the last few minutes attending to the welfare of the participants. If any participant appeared distressed by the session the researcher intended to work with them to minimise these feelings and ensure that they felt able to leave the session. However, in all cases the participants were pleased with the experience and many reported that they had enjoyed it. Following one focus group, the members agreed that the topic should be discussed further during their next team meeting as they felt it was useful to reflect on the subject. The researcher was also invited to return to a number of the groups when the research was complete to report back the findings.
In summary, the researcher has referred to social constructionism and the person centred approach to study EPs’ views of factors that influence job approbation, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction when working within multi-agency local authority contexts. Following a pilot study, the remaining data were collected via a series of focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The data was then transcribed before being analysed using an inductive, explicit approach to thematic analysis. The next chapter will present the results of this analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The results were generated through a combination of focus groups and interviews designed to cover all of the research questions. Therefore, data is presented together in this chapter. The next chapter will review the research questions separately. The results are presented in terms of the five broad themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the data. The themes were Approbation, Autonomy, Job Dissatisfaction, Job Satisfaction and Multi-Agency Working. It is recognised that three of the themes are identical to terms used in the title of the research. However, these themes emerged naturally from the thematic analysis rather than being imposed from the start. As they appeared to be the most appropriate self contained broad themes around which the data fits it was decided to keep these titles. A summary of these themes is displayed on the following page in figure 4.1.
Figure 4.1: Summary of themes

N.B. The arrows in figure 4.1 represent multi-directional overlap between two themes
4.2 Approbation

The focus groups included discussion about participants' understanding of the concept approbation via question three in the schedule. Through these conversations, participants identified key features as **Who provides approbation?**, **Feedback received** and **Relationships**. Most participants agreed that “approbation is only one aspect of job satisfaction.” and that “job satisfaction is the overarching theme, with approbation as one of the strands of it.” One EP stated:

**I4** “There is a potential to validate your job formally and then there is validation that comes in more spontaneous way from people within the structure. Then there’s another kind of validation that comes from appraisal and whether or not that is experienced in the same way as the official validation as opposed to something which comes spontaneously from your work life.”

Another participant felt that:

**F1A.P1** “It's a lot to do with the social psychology or interactional psychology or even sociology. The social construction of reality. To what extent the messages that you get back are positive strokes about the work you do.”

4.2.1 Who provides approbation?

Considering who gives approbation to EPs much of the discussions centred around line managers, supervisors and those in management posts within the LA. Four EPs felt that receiving approbation was an important aspect of supervision. One individual explained that it was an important consideration for her when applying for her current post:

**F2.P3** “I think, that is one of the reasons why we should have good supervision. One of the things I looked for when coming to this job was that it included supervision....You need a lot when you first start and you need to be able to sound things out and hear that you are doing a good job. And I think it's one of the really nice parts of the job.”
This sentiment was echoed by a newly qualified EP:

**F1B.P4** “You grow much more through supervision, and you grow much more through being able to try out somebody else’s techniques and getting feedback on how you are doing. You need to hear it from someone with more experience. It gives you the confidence you need. I think supervision is one of the absolute delights of doing the job.”

Many participants also discussed receiving approbation from senior management within their local authority. However, there was widespread scepticism that positive feedback from management outside of the EP teams was genuine. Approbation from senior management was described as “superficial” and “lip service” with one participant expressing the view that “we are not really valued”. There was also a feeling that the way in which approbation was delivered to EPs by senior management was often inappropriate and had the opposite effect to that intended. One focus group discussed an idea that had been recently agreed at a local management group. The idea which was being heard for the first time by many participants was met with incredulity:

**F1B.P6** “They said that they were going to institute a new system whereby each team has to nominate one of its team members for a special prize for being a good practitioner....So everybody in the team will have chance to be star of the week and receive formal approbation and the prize. Guess what the prize will be? The opportunity to go to a local management meeting where the manager will read out a summary of the work that has been accomplished, while the person sits there and then everybody around the table will be able to give them a round of applause. They thought this would be a lovely thing... and then they would go out to lunch with one of the directors.”

Written responses to EPs met with a similar cynicism:

**F2.P5** “The director of education would write a letter, and it was often a one-liner. You know, ‘I have heard about the good piece of work that you did at such and such a school’ and underneath using some sort of
crummy word art it would say well done, and then they would sign it and it was incredibly infantile and patronizing.”

One EP however empathized with senior management, acknowledging that it must be difficult to “get it right. For feedback to be professional, adult, valued and meaningful.” Two EPs expressed the view that approbation from senior management was rare and that one consequence of it's infrequency was that it could “therefore have a very positive effect.” One participant commented that:

F2.P2 “If the director called me into his office and said, I am very pleased with that bit of work that you did in school. That would be so unusual that it would be something that would stand out and have an impact.”

However, a substantial number felt that those working at or around director level within their LAs were unaware of the work undertaken by EPs and therefore provided little or no approbation. One participant commented:

F1B.P5 “A precondition for having external approbation is that they would actually know we were there and know what we do.” and “I would not expect approbation from them.”

While many individuals questioned the frequency, genuineness and appropriateness of approbation from LA senior management, all participants felt strongly that peer approbation was “very different”, important and directly linked to job satisfaction. A key difference appeared to be that “colleagues would be very honest... and be able to give examples and for it to be meaningful.” However, there appeared to be differences between EP teams as to the frequency that peer approbation was given. At one focus group, four of the participants agreed with the comment:

F1B.P4 “I am not sure that your colleagues necessarily would notice that you were doing a good job”.

One authority had tried to overcome this issue by providing a formal method for colleagues to provide feedback to one another by introducing a standard item “Positive Strokes” to their team meeting agenda. The team manager commented that this was required “because we are not good at it and we are
not good at accepting it either.” However, the majority felt that spontaneous approbation was forthcoming from colleagues. One EP commented that “we do a lot of that in our own team” while another said “you get job satisfaction when colleagues turn round and say ‘Yes, you helped me a lot in the way that you did that.’” There was also widespread agreement that approbation from colleagues had a specific effect:

F2.P3 “I’ve been in different teams and I think if you have a good, supportive team who help each other, notice when you have done something well it gives you lots of job satisfaction. The team is more effective too if you work as a supportive unit rather than a bunch of individuals.”

Participants also discussed the importance of approbation from schools in validating their work and there appeared to be a shared view that schools “are key players in influencing outcomes.” There were many examples of positive feedback from schools including one EP who said:

F1B.P5 “When they come back to you, and they say ‘Wow, it's just made such a difference’ you feel great.”

And another who commented:

F2.P2 “School are always saying ‘Oh thank goodness, you are coming in’ and you feel you are valued.”

However, one participant felt that there may be a conflict in wanting to please schools:

F1B.P5 “I think sometimes people do tend to want to please schools and that may sometimes run counter to the policies and procedures that we have, because they feel that it's important to have a positive relationship with schools, and sometimes a positive relationship is to do with giving of something like a reciprocity thing. Like almost an anthropological thing.”

Key questions that participants asked while considering approbation were “Do we care really? Whose feedback do we value?” At least 10 participants expressed the view that their own personal assessment of the work they had
undertaken was more important to them than approbation. One participant stated:

**F2.P5** “I don't need a pat on the back, and I won't get one. And I don't expect one, but I know I've done a good job and I'm happy with that.”

While someone else commented:

**F1A.P1** “It is more about me and how I do it and the way that I evaluate things myself. Yes, it is nice to get a note saying thank you for all your hard work, it is really appreciated, but it’s not the thing that drives me.”

Two suggestions as to why people may feel this way emerged. The first was linked to personality, with a number of EPs suggesting that a certain type of person may be drawn to becoming an EP. The suggestion being that many may not require a great deal of positive feedback from others:

**F2.P3** “I suppose it is part of my character as well, that I don't necessarily need the approbation from other people.”

**MI1** “I think many EPs are quite sure of themselves really. Not necessarily stubborn but more confident that what they are doing is based on evidence rather than popularity.”

A second suggestion related to the complexity of the work undertaken by EPs. Many participants felt that others may not always recognise or fully comprehend the work that the EP had undertaken:

**F1B.P4** “A lot of what EPs do is very subtle. Some of it is very skilful, but it's not explicitly skilful, so an EP might identify the problem is that the school has a negative attitude towards the child, and the intervention is reframing and changing people’s mind about the child. To an unskilled outsider they might see what the EP has done and say well the EP has not done anything. But actually the EP knows that the next time they go into that school that child is going to be happier and staff will have a better relationship with the child and that will make a real difference. Now if the person is not a psychologist they may think he hasn’t really done anything, he has just gone and had a chat.”
Another individual commented that:

**F2.P5** “Other people don’t recognize our work because it’s too complicated, because you might be dealing with 30 different schools with different relationships, personalities, narratives, expectations and needs. All of them need to be approached differently using a variety of skills.”

### 4.2.2 Feedback received

Within each focus group, there were several individuals who explored the usefulness of feedback from others. There was general agreement that:

**I4** “I would find it more affirming, if the person in question is actually giving me feedback based upon something definite that I had done.”

And

**F1B.P6** “My personal opinion about what is affirming is feedback from people based upon the direct work that I have actually done. So, specific feedback about something that I have done not just a generalised comment.”

Feedback from different sources appears to have varying impact:

**F2.P2** “Particularly if it’s people that I respect who are giving the positive feedback. So if it’s somebody who I feel does a good job in their role and gives me positive feedback. Then that is even more affirming than somebody that I might not feel was doing such a good job.”

And

**F2.P4** “Some feedback, will mean more to you than other forms of feedback.”

Both positive and negative feedback was universally viewed as important by EPs as it provides opportunities to reflect and adapt practice. One participant commented that:

**I1** “Negative feedback might give you some things to work on or it may be constructive.”
And another said:

**F1B.P6** “Constructive feedback might help you change your practice rather than just negative feedback.”

Another participant describes how she used constructive criticism to help shape her practice:

**F1B.P5** “And sometimes you might know that something is wrong but not quite be able to put your finger on it. You might know that they are not happy, but I’m not sure what they are not happy about, and then when you get that feedback. You know what it is and can change it.”

However, there also existed frustrations when negative feedback was received that participants felt were unjustified. One EP stated:

**F2.P3** “A parental questionnaire might say you did not spend enough time with the parent or child. And you are thinking, yes that’s right, I agree, but that is out of my control. So it’s not exactly good feedback, but it’s interesting.”

Another participant reported that:

**MI1** “Schools complain that we have not supported a statement, or that basically we have not viewed a situation the way they do. It does not mean that I will change my mind but then that feedback can be used as a measure of the service I have provided. That is wrong as I am not employed just to make everyone feel good and agree with them.”

There was also agreement that positive feedback was received infrequently. One participant commented that:

**F2.P3** “I am very aware that you very rarely get feedback.”

While another thought there may be a cultural reason for this:

**I4** “I don’t think educational psychologists get that much positive feedback based upon my experience because I think people are just too busy, and people don’t feel that need. There is almost that very British
embarrassment about saying ‘thank you, you did a really good job there.’ They don’t see that as their role and it isn’t a culturally normal thing to do.”

4.2.3 Relationships

Overwhelmingly, participants voiced the opinion that approbation usually came from those with whom one had a good relationship as “They know your work more personally”. The theme of relationships appeared to subdivide into approbation given due to having good relationships and the job satisfaction that came from establishing and maintaining relationships. There was a strong sense that colleagues provide approbation, particularly when the individuals in the team are able to work closely together. One participant felt that colleagues:

F1A.P1 “Know you hopefully, they respect you and hopefully they'll listen to you because you have that relationship. They can then give you meaningful feedback on the work that you do.”

However, it was felt by all six participants in one group that the individual EP has to work at creating and maintaining those relationships:

F2.P3 “I have always held it as important for me to gain people’s respect about things that I do as a worker in the workplace. Basic things like being reliable, and on time, and if I promised to do something I’d do it. And that's not about being an EP that's just about being a colleague in the workplace.”

Interestingly the teams who thought they worked most closely together and where team work was most valued felt they often provided spontaneous approbation to each other:

F1B.P4 “In this office, a lot of people ask other people for advice. There is lots of interaction and discussion. It’s different to working on your own, which we have to do quite a lot. There are always opportunities to ask colleagues for advice and opinions. I think that leads to more approbation from colleagues.”

And
“We give each other good feedback because everybody helps out. There is nobody who thinks I am an expert in this. Everybody shares and helped each other out, which is good.”

Working to build and maintain good relationships was seen as equally important for EPs with their schools:

“I think a lot of that actually depends upon your working relationship with key members of staff in schools. If you get that then you are off to a good start. When you build that good relationship they start to trust you, they are willing to try things, they are more willing to give you approbation and you do feel valued.”

And

“Where you feel part of that school and you are working in collaboration, you are working together in some way. Then they value your work far more and it feels of more value to you too.”

Nevertheless many participants reported that building up trust, respect and a good relationship with schools takes time. Therefore the degree of approbation received from schools appeared to be related to the amount of time the EP have available to work closely with the school. One participant stated:

“One of the factors that might change is that if you have a relationship with the school that makes it easier, and that makes a difference, doesn’t it? But if your schools change, you don’t have direct responsibility for the school or they just have a handful of hours each year you can’t really expect them to say nice things about you, because they don’t have a relationship with you.”

4.3 Autonomy

Autonomy emerged as highly significant to job satisfaction for EPs and was mentioned in almost all data collection sessions. This theme broke down into four sub-themes of Personal Organisation, Work/life Balance, Individual Personality and Locus of Evaluation. This quote summarizes what many EPs expressed with regard to autonomy:
F1B.P6 “Autonomy I think personally for me is a very big thing in this job. We have a certain degree of managing ourselves and the freedom to do that, within reason. And I think that’s one of the huge strengths of being an educational psychologist that you set your own diary and manage your own casework. That is something that personally for me, gives me satisfaction. But that’s not other people giving me approbation.”

There was widespread agreement that the degree of autonomy given to EPs is something that makes the profession different from many other professionals working in the LA. This relates both to autonomy in carrying out day to day duties and autonomy in determining the sort of work the EP specialises in long term. One participant summarised this as follows:

F1B.P5 “As I go on through my career I start to get to know my schools. You get to know your colleagues, systems, and then you start to carve out your role, your niche and you sort of make your own job and we all work in different ways, because we all developed in different ways and have a lot of freedom to do that. We all do essentially the same thing but we have developed our own career pathways and ways we work.”

While this was seen as an aspect of the job that EPs valued, negative consequences to high levels of autonomy were also discussed. For instance, one EP stated:

I4 “You're in this kind of vacuum again of organizing, you are left to organise your own work in your own way. Manage your own time, work from home, manage your own diary, deal with all the complexities of relationships with schools and other people and the way other people complicate those relationships, and you do all that yourself and the minute something doesn’t work out you hear about it. But you don't hear about all that went well, you put in these extra hours or this was a real success, thanks for turning that around, because the mechanisms are not there really.”

Some EPs also thought that high levels of autonomy in the profession may impact negatively on others’ perceptions of EPs. For instance:
F1B.P4 “If EPs autonomy means they can do as they please then it confuses those we work with. I’ve met EPs who justify their actions by saying ‘Well it’s the art that I am practising.’ We can’t call ourselves scientist practitioners unless we evidence what we do. So I would say that a degree of uniformity of service is essential, tempered by common sense and opportunity and freedom for people to play to their individual strengths and interests.”

There were also participants who thought autonomy for the profession was not as high as the majority perceived and that this has been a recent and ongoing change. For instance, one long serving EP stated:

F1B.P5 “I think in some ways, we don’t have as much autonomy as I think we should have had..... I think the scope for being more heterogeneous is maybe starting to diminish.”

While in a separate interview one EP commented:

F2.P2 “I sense in the past that you could be a little bit more discursive. Now, I think that divergent way of thinking is started to take a more convergent path.”

It was suggested that the reason why this may be the case is related to EPs having been unsuccessful at articulating what they could offer within Children’s Services. For instance:

I1 “We have now to wait to see what the authority deems our remit should be and it is a shame, because I think we could have looked at shaping our own remit within Children’s Integrated Services..... I think that there is another opportunity coming now, but we are almost leaving it to the whims of other people to decide what the educational psychologist service will do and how it can shape things.”

It was also suggested that the current economic climate and government spending cuts were impacting on EP autonomy:

F1B.P6 “It’s like the government is focusing on outcomes as if by saying it, it somehow makes it happen. And I think because of that the
autonomy of the profession is starting to disappear because people are starting to look for more of the hard-nosed value for money, particularly at the current time. They are asking ‘What does this contribute to?’”

**F2.P2** “At the moment we have actually got a government very focused on value for money, and I think that could move us towards being more homogenous and therefore the opportunity for people to do pieces of research, the more creative work or other projects might start to be lost, because it is not seen to be earning money.”

### 4.3.1 Personal Organisation

EPs generally agreed that in order for autonomy to be viewed as a positive aspect of the job a high degree of self discipline was required. One participant commented that:

**I4** “I think the way you organise yourself has a big impact on job satisfaction.”

While another said:

**F1B.P5** “It’s self-discipline really in this job. It’s quite a high self-discipline element to it and if for instance you are drawn to write very complex reports. Then you need to watch that that doesn’t get out of hand.”

Others agreed that the way individuals organised workload, particularly variety between direct and indirect work was important. For instance:

**F1B.P4** “You have to keep tabs on your organisation and make sure that you’re not doing report writing on consecutive days. Make sure that you’re not doing a whole week of report writing, because that is really boring.”

The amount of effort that was put into a piece of work was also viewed as an element to individual autonomy and personal organisation. All participants in one focus group agreed with the following:

**F2.P2** “For instance, if you talk about casework that leads to court work I would want a very polished piece of work. If we were talking about
perhaps a piece of casework that resulted in change within the school for instance, then attending an IEP meeting may be sufficient, and I may not follow that up until a review is necessary. So it really does depend upon what is required, and of course, as psychologists we have to move between the levels very effectively.”

4.3.2 Work/life Balance

A second sub-theme to autonomy to emerge related to EPs ability to maintain a good work/life balance. Some participants felt that it was neither possible nor desirable to only be a psychologist during the working week. There was general agreement to the comment:

I2 “It’s like a living thing isn’t it? It’s like you’re living it as well…..The job does not have clear boundaries and that’s the nice thing about it, that’s the real positive”

Another participant explained why it might be useful to use psychology outside of work:

F2.P2 “If you have a conflict in your own personal life you can actually bring some of the things that you’ve learned and use them as well. Restorative approaches for instance, or conflict management, accessible dialogue or whatever. It puts you as a person in a slightly better position than you might have been. And personally I feel like I am not naturally that way inclined, in my personal life, and I probably benefit from learning about these different approaches. ….. Generally I am probably a slightly nicer person as a result of having read about psychology.”

However, some EPs felt it was important to maintain boundaries between work and home life. One explained it as follows:

I2 “It depends upon how much work is a central life interest. So if you invest all of your emotions, your interests in work and self-actualisation into work and you feel that it’s not being positively regarded then your opportunities to feel negative about yourself will increase. Alternatively, if work is one of a number of factors and interests in your life. And you can
offset stressful periods of time in your work with other things in your life. Like your family, your leisure interests, then it doesn’t impact as heavily I suspect. The question is to what extent work focuses as a central life interest and to what extent people can use buffering to protect themselves.”

Another EP made a similar point:

I1 “For psychological well-being you need lots of interests outside of work that are not related. Walking, painting, sports etcetera......Work should be a small part of a general whole. Their professional role should be a segment that they can separate from. However, there will always be that link across.”

At least eight of the participants felt it was difficult to maintain a good work/life balance. One commented:

I4 “I think it varies. There are times of the year, when I think my work/life balance is very good and there are other times of the year, when I think it is probably pretty bad. It’s not always easy to maintain a healthy balance.”

Another EP stated:

I3 “I do work on the weekends, but I guess most of us do and actually I think we are pretty well paid for what we do. So, I don’t mind doing that. I would probably feel very differently, if my pay and conditions started to be eroded. Then I think that would leech a lot of my goodwill away, but at the moment I don’t mind doing the extras, because I’d always done that.”

Others also reported that they carried out work in their own time:

F2.P2 “If you ask me have I got the right work/life balance, I would say no.... you have to do lots of work in your own time and at home and at weekends.”
I1 “I don’t think that I do have a good work/life balance, and I think that work probably takes more of my time than it should do. But I think that I’m not the only one in this profession like that, and you are always torn between what are your professional duties and what are your family duties or your personal life. And you make the sacrifices which you think are appropriate.”

One EP suggested that a reason for EPs working outside of work hours is that they are generally helpful individuals who are not always good at saying no:

I3 “I think the more you are willing and capable of giving, the more you will be asked to give, so it is a self perpetuating problem, particularly if ‘no’ is not in your vocabulary. It is hard to get the right work/life balance, and I think it is easy to underestimate that.”

Another EP suggested that EPs don’t always prioritise work effectively:

F2.P2 “Sometimes you have to cut your losses and see what opportunities are available, because if you are putting your effort into something that will not really make a difference you are wasting time and effort. Work out where and when it is useful to put extra effort in and do it. Don’t spend your personal time writing a report you think is well written but ultimately no-one will read.”

Others felt that there was a choice between maintaining boundaries around working hours or producing work they were happy with:

I3 “You get to that point where there are a lot of things to do and you won’t compromise your reports. You just end up spending time you don’t have writing them. So then you are working extra hours, and there is some ability to time in lieu to some degree, but it’s a limited ability. So you end up just doing much longer hours.”

F1B.P6 “The reports are very important, but I think it’s when you feel as if the amount of work you’ve got means you have to compromise the quality of the reports you write.”
4.3.3 Who is the client?

One of the reasons autonomy was seen as so important for EPs was a lack of clarity around who is/are their clients. One participant commented:

F1B.P4 “there is also the issue about who the client is, which we are always grappling with. So, who are we trying to please? Is it the parent, the child, the school or yourself?”

This was seen as problematic for at least eight participants:

F2.P1 “I think it’s about not knowing who you are working for and who you are trying to please really.”

While four others seemed clearer:

F1A.P3 “I don’t find that so bad, because ultimately I think you’re working for the child and you just take the rap.”

4.3.4 Personality

When discussing autonomy a number of participants wanted to consider if there were particular character traits that those who entered the profession shared. One participant commented:

I1 “Personality plays a big part, because I think you need a certain mental framework and social skills to be able to deal with our challenges.”

Another felt that:

F2.P1 “Personality is an important part of being an EP, because you do things in a certain way, and you responds in a certain way. If you responded in the same way as other people I don’t think you would end up finding the same solutions and moving things on. So it is very much a personality thing.”

However, one EP felt this was more to do with the training than personality:

I3 “The people I am now seeing coming into the profession have wider experience. These are people who worked in youth clubs, and nurseries
in social care, much wider, much broader. Now, whether they are drawn to the profession due to their experience or the set of genes they popped out with I’m really not sure but they are all going to go through the same training course and I suspect that will have most impact on the type of EP they become.”

One EP expressed the opinion that being content to work independently without the need for approbation was a trait shared by many of their colleagues:

I3 “To what extent the people need positive strokes? I think some people need them to keep themselves going under but many EPs I know don’t and I think that might be a personality variable.”

At least ten EPs agreed. One explained:

F1A.P1 “I think a lot of it is personality driven. The drive I have is an internal drive. It’s about how I view my work and how I feel about the challenges.”

4.3.5 Locus of Evaluation

During discussions many EPs talk about having a strong internal locus of evaluation (Rogers, 1964) rather than looking for external cues for approbation, motivation and appraisal. For instance:

F2.P1 “I wondered as well, if it linked to intrinsic and extrinsic in the way that we [sic] a lot of it comes from ourselves and our own motivation, because obviously with doing the job we are quite motivated.”

This also linked to internal standards:

F2.P2 “I feel I set my own standards, and I work to my standards, and the authority happens to pay me.” and “I carry out my own internal appraisal.”

Another participant put this more bluntly:

I1 “I don’t work for the management. I work for me.”
This resonated with at least 75% of EPs who expressed the view that they carried out their work in an analytical way and then reflected upon it:

F2.P1 “At the end of each piece of work, I will review it to see how well did I do that? What could I have done differently? and you are in that framework of the reflective practitioner.”

I3 “We tend to be more analytical.” and “capable of looking at issues in detail and I suspect that one of those things is that we can be very analytical.”

There was a strong sense that internal evaluation stood in place of approbation for some EPs:

F2.P1 “I think there is much that is self-sustaining from the day to day work that EPs do such as research, casework, training, etcetera. and I think that for many it stands in place of the kind of satisfaction that comes through approbation.”

However, one EP questioned the extent to which others’ views of our work might still influence EPs’ internal evaluation:

I3 “If you do in your own mind a not particular good job in the sense that you feel that you could have done much better but then somebody comes to you and says ‘fantastic, that was a brilliant piece of work.’ Do you then re-evaluate your own set of constructs about what you are doing? Or vice versa, if you think you have done a really solid piece of work, and you can see all the intricacies of what people say, but the client did not get what they wanted out of it. Do you start re-evaluating that set of dynamics, and then start shifting your own core constructs, away from that?”

Others thought this may be a worthy area of future research:

F1B.P4 “It would be interesting to do a psychological experiment to see just how robust the educational psychologist impressions would be of their own work.”
4.4 Job Dissatisfaction

All EPs in all of the data collection exercises expressed frustration and dissatisfaction to varying degrees. In many sessions it felt as though EPs would like to have discussed job dissatisfaction in more detail than it was possible to do due to time constraints. The theme of Job Dissatisfaction broke down into eleven subordinate themes. These were Frustrations, Managing Expectations, Bureaucracy, Resources, Outcomes / Outputs, Feeling Valued, Encroachment of Others, Not Making a Difference, Lack of Recognition, Distributed Teams and Stress and Anxiety.

4.4.1 Frustrations

Many EPs discussed frustrations with the role but there was a great deal of sympathy for the view:

F1B.P6 “There are many frustrations with this job and you should not enter the job if you are not prepared to deal with frustrations.”

A frustration that resonated with many EPs was what many felt were restrictions on how they work imposed by the LA employer. As one EP commented:

F2.P1 “Working in a LA there are things that restrict solutions....Bureaucracy is at every turn, and it seems sometimes you take two steps forward and one step back, and the only approach you can take working for a LA is to persevere and persevere and persevere.”

Others echoed these sentiments:

I1 “The host culture is not always amenable to something that you feel quite strongly should be happening. So yes, there are lots of frustrations in terms of being part of the local authority.”

Almost all expressed the view that the constraints they felt imposed from the LA meant they were often not effective in the universally agreed aim of making a difference for children. For instance one participant commented:

I3 “I sometimes feel not satisfied with what I do, because sometimes I think am I intervening at the wrong bit or not doing the thing that is
actually going to make a difference for children..... We are encouraged to waste an enormous amount of time doing things that are not tangible.”

I2 “I think there are quite a large element of the things that we do that don't follow through with the client to become that useful. But in this authority we just haven't got an opportunity.”

One EP explained the frustration he felt when encountering one strand of the LA working in what he perceived to be direct opposition to the aims of the EPS:

I1 “It's frustrating; we have a number of systems which are inconsistent. This authority has been very successful in reducing permanent exclusions, but that is because we have a team who will do fairly quick moves from schools to prevent permanent exclusion requiring virtually very little to be demonstrated in terms of inclusive practice. Now, if I have been working with the school to reduce exclusions but the school thinks I can't be bothered with this anymore they can easily get the child moved. Now you've invested all this time and effort in trying to make a difference for a child but you are being undermined by parts of your own organisation. That sort of thing happens quite a lot and we are not getting anywhere close to resolving it.”

Linked to frustrations with the LA was a general dissatisfaction with undertaking statutory assessment work. Most agreed with the statement from one participant:

F1A.P3 “Actually I think statutory work is one of the least satisfying things we do.”

Over twelve people expressed frustrations with statutory work. Some felt it tied them into a deficit model perspective which ran counter to their professional training and personal views:

F1A.P5 “It’s quite negative really because you're trying to meet a criteria and is very much deficit model and you're working to strict guidelines and you want your work to be positive, and it doesn't feel that way.”
Another participant felt this could have long term negative consequences for the child:

I1 “What you have done is created the expectation or help to establish that there is a long-term significant need that won't get any better, and to say that about somebody is really, well, it's just so against my whole sense of who I am, and everything.”

Others expressed the view that there might not be a great deal of psychology involved in most statutory work:

F1B.P6 “That we were tied in with statutory work in this authority and the role of the psychologist became part of the special educational needs industry.... It's just so bureaucratic, and not that anyone could do it but you know, there isn't really that much psychology involved when you think about it.”

4.4.2 Managing expectations

Unsurprisingly, perceptions of EPs by schools were a focal point of discussion in all sessions. There was a general feeling that different schools may have very different expectations of what the EP is there to do:

F2.P2 “There is a mixed client expectation because you get a mixed bag of schools.”

This was seen as potentially problematic. For instance:

F2.P3 “It depends upon what schools perceptions are about what our job is and if they come with a particular set of assumptions about what our job is they may go away feeling dissatisfied.”

And

I4 “When you go for a meeting in a school they may have some tacit ideas of what you are coming to do. And if you don't come and do those things they may feel dissatisfied, that is not the same as not doing a good job.”
Many felt that a substantial number of schools still view the EP as a “gatekeeper to resources”. Related to this was a feeling that many schools perceive that a key role of the EP is to offer support to a school’s application for a statement of SEN or other potential routes to funding:

**F1B.P5** “You can go in at the beginning and the school says, ‘We would like you to support funding application’, but you might know that that’s not what you’re doing, so, you know you’re not going to please them. And you know they’re not going to be pleased at the end.”

This conflict was seen as directly linking to the amount of approbation the EP was likely to receive from the school. Expectations from schools were also seen as being influenced by their experiences with previous EPs. For instance, one participant commented:

**F1A.P1** “An additional frustration is that schools don’t always embrace changes in EP practice. A new EP may be trained to write quite short reports while the previous one wrote long reports. School may not immediately see the benefits of writing shorter reports and might complain that the new EP is not writing a good enough, long enough report.”

Another EP felt that:

**F2.P5** “If you have a school SENCo (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) that never had an EP they sometimes expect different things of you, but as soon as the SENCo is socialised into expectations from the school then that changes. It seems that they seem to define the role quite narrowly. Whereas the public expect all sorts of different things from psychologists.”

One individual in a focus group thought a more consistent and uniformed practice may enable EPs to have a greater influence over schools perceptions. There was agreement within all focus groups that schools would experience a higher degree of frustration with the EP profession unless there was a degree of uniformity of service. One participant made this point by comparing EPs with dentists:
“If you went to the dentist and the dentist gave the anaesthetic after taking out the tooth you would think ‘Hang on a minute. There is something not right.’ So in a sense, certain structures help us understand our work and help other people to understand what we do.”

Another EP felt that:

“If we don’t have a practice that is recognizable in some ways, then we leave ourselves open to challenge.”

However, many also felt that it would be unrealistic to expect identical service from each practitioner. One manager compared EPs with teachers as follows:

“When head teachers say to me ‘Well, I get different service from one educational psychologist to another.’ I say, ‘Of course. You get a different service from one teacher to another.’”

There was also a feeling that many SENCos are not always sure what they expect from EPs or have unrealistic expectations. One EP commented:

“You are continually getting schools asking you things that you can’t answer and you are on the front line. Schools kind of expect you to be able to tell them the answer to things that have nothing to do with your remit and that’s quite frustrating, because you can’t, and there is a level of expectation. You can feel that expectation although you know it’s not really related to your role but if you don’t try to help it affects your relationship with the school.”

Another participant commented that:

“But sometimes schools are able to say that they did not get what they wanted even though they were not able to say what they wanted.”

Parents were another group whose perceptions of EPs were sometimes a cause of frustration. A substantial group felt that EPs were viewed by parents as too closely linked to schools and the local authority. One participant stated:
F1A.P1 “Parents might have felt the school had been using us to bash them and at times we have been used like that.”

Many participants agreed that parents’ past experiences of working with other professionals influenced the perceptions they were likely to have of EPs. One participant said that:

F1B.P5 “I can usually sniff out situations where somebody I’m talking to has had a bad experience previously. Quite often it’s been with psychiatrists because they often confuse us with them or somebody in the mental health world. A professional that they have dealt with and it has not been a good situation and they bring all those preconceptions to working with you.”

However, it was agreed that as with schools it was also important to explicitly contract with parents:

F2.P3 “I personally always ask parents what their best hopes are of my involvement and I find that quite often that leads to a really useful discussion.”

Once again the perceptions of LA senior management outside of the EPS were seen as important. Those who were concerned tended to feel that:

F1B.P4 “There is a narrow view of what we do at the top end.” and “It is interesting who manages the EPS and their influence. The people who are calling the shots maybe don’t understand some of the details.” and “They see the role of the psychologist more as being involved in statutory work. And that is an oversight on their behalf but we could easily be shoehorned back into that role in the current climate.”

4.4.3 Bureaucracy

Over half of those taking part in the research expressed apathy around organisational changes taking place in services. Many talked about attempting to ignore the changes:
F2.P1 “I am just getting on. I don’t even understand the management system now. I don’t know who line manages above as it changes that many times within the service.”

Another recounted a specific example of how the apathy from EPs was received by managers:

I2 “We have here, a director’s roadshow regularly since Children's Services, and we have attended a number of them. And that the last one, the director asked us a specific question. ‘Do you feel, you know the structure?’ and we were to get into little groups and our little group said. ‘No we don’t.’ Well, that wasn’t the answer that she wanted. She was actually very cross that we did not, but I think we all felt that we could go and search on the website. It is probably all there but because it changes literally week to week, we have not got the time to engage with it and so we had just been getting on with the job. It hasn't impacted greatly on us.”

Others seemed to have an understanding of the structure they were currently working in but shared the general lack of interest:

F1A.P3 “So we have come from being a very separate service to linking with special educational needs assessment to become a joint service to going into children’s integrated services and there is a feeling that there is a new structure coming along soon.” and “I think we could end up with a different structure in the next few months.”

However, one EP felt that the apathy was a mask for high anxiety levels:

M4 “I might be very happy in my day to day operational job with my head in the sand to the stuff going on above me but then there is all the massive anxieties about are we all going to be employed? Are we only going to be sold services? You know, what is the big picture in terms of equal pay review, pay cuts and all the rest? Some of us are not being very psychological about this and thinking if we ignore it, it will all go away.”
One of the reasons for this apathy also seemed to relate to many EPs feeling that they are often directed rather than consulted:

**F1A.P1** “But what those people do, if they want to make that happen is they tell the person below them. And then that person tells the person below them. And so it goes down the chain, until I hear. What I end up being told is that X ought to happen, but X requires a lot of changes in a very cumbersome administrative system. And this person just expects me to make something happen. So orders go through the chain but nobody in the chain feels that they have control of the way things are done.”

This view was echoed in all authorities and summarised as follows:

**I1** “They see management as being something to do with control, overview and being top down.....When this great big management system, thinks something is important they organise corporate training rather than talk with the staff. Well, I think, that is the wrong way round, and it does not give a message of respect.”

### 4.4.4 Resources

Another frustration that was mentioned in all LAs taking part in the research was lack of resources. Lack of available time was put forward as a reason why the most appropriate tools for the work were often not used. One participant stated:

**F1B.P6** “You are often left with the tools that you have in your own kitbag rather than having the luxury of time to go out and find the right tools that would help that particular teacher in that particular situation. So sometimes, you are using a pair of pliers, rather than a spanner in order to get the job done.”

This resonated with at least eight EPs. One commented:

**I2** “A lot of the time you are, because of the volume of work restricted to using what you have available at the time rather than what might be the ideal.”
In a different authority the same frustration emerged:

**MI2** “I think there is the pressure of the job. I think it’s difficult to get proper supervision and I acknowledge that there is not enough. Proper supervision goes on here, but because of the time constraints, we are always short staffed, because the only way to get more supervision is to see less children, which would ramp up the stress on everybody else.”

Some EPs also felt that the time pressures of the job meant adequate supervision was not always provided. One participant commented:

**F1B.P4** “Because of the time pressures supervision tends not to happen and that seems to me to be a real loss.”

The volume of work was also seen to impact on the service being delivered to clients:

**F1A.P3** “Just like many of my colleagues, at times I am going for what is good enough, rather than the diamond standard.”

Another individual stated:

**F2.P3** “I don't have any issues about the sort of work that I am asked to do. I have issues around the volume of work, and the amount of time that I have got available in the end.”

There was a high level of agreement that lack of resources impacts on EPs perceptions of how valued they are by the LA and that this then can impact on EP’s levels of motivation. One manager explained a problem she encounters:

**MI1** “I need an office to myself. I am supervising nine people, and I have to have meetings, which can't be private. And I have to book a room and there aren't enough rooms available and I am being told by those above me that my work is valued but actually you are not being given the tools and resources you need to do your work. It doesn't ring true. It feels superficial and insincere.”

A number of main grade EPs discussed similar experiences:
"If the hierarchy don't see fit to provide us with sufficient telephone lines or other essential support etcetera. then it makes you wonder well do they really value us and what we do?"

Another EP in the same focus group stated:

"It is also things like our office accommodation, and I think that speaks volumes about how the higher levels understand the nature of your work and how they appreciate you as a professional. And that leaves me feeling actually, no they don't understand what I do and they don't appreciate me. They don't value me at all, as a professional or as a person."

In another focus group one participant shared a similar view:

"It is little things like I had asked if I could have a wheelie bag, and it took six to nine months to get it. You know, that just makes me feel as though that what I do is not important."

There were also frustrations expressed in all participating LAs about recent or ongoing changes to administration and IT support. It was felt that this had an impact on participant's ability to carry out their role. One individual stated:

"Lack of admin support has a negative impact on approbation yet in their wisdom they think that sacking low paid admin people is cost effective."

A number felt that the changes added extra pressure to EPs:

"From a pragmatic perspective, there is a lot of dissatisfaction with the accounting that we have to do. All the record-keeping and difficulties with IT services. It is very frustrating. We are doing lots of admin work, and you know, it's not the best way of using our time. We become quite highly trained and paid admin people."

While in one authority resources needed for day to day casework appeared to be distributed across a number of locations:
F1A.P3 “So the resource centre with admin support and all of our test kits and other equipment is a car journey away from our office. When you get there, there is no parking for lots of essential car users.”

There were strong feelings expressed that resource providers displayed a lack of understanding or interest in the specialist needs of EPs. For instance, one participant gave the following example:

I1 “We have also a member of staff on our team, who is dyslexic and who needs to use Dragon software to dictate reports, and this person was being moved to an open plan office, where he can no longer use the software. He was going to his car to dictate his reports in the middle of winter. When we said this was unacceptable, all that they did was come and put a screen between him and other people. So now they can’t see him but can still hear confidential reports being dictated. So he still goes to the car.”

There were also frustrations expressed about lack of resources available for children with whom EPs had worked:

F1B.P6 “Lack of resources is a frustration when you have a very strong view about what a particular child needs, whether it is in terms of speech and language therapy or a certain kind of school that they need and it’s just not available or if it is, it can’t be paid for. You see the effect of not meeting those needs and it’s very frustrating when you know that something could have been done.”

4.4.5 Outcomes / outputs

Another frustration that was expressed strongly by participants concerned an expectation that they would focus on outputs rather than outcomes:

F1A.P3 “It’s a bit like a lot of educational psychologists work. We are very good at saying, this is the outputs of what we do, but the outcomes are another matter.”

This again seemed linked to expectations from managers:
F1B.P4 “It seems here that management are sensitive to the kinds of things that have numbers attached to them or have external objective, solid existence in for instance, a publication or an invitation externally to do something. They are sensitive to those very crude observable things.”

And

I1 “What they are not sensitive to is effective consultation and working with other people in the true sense where you facilitate somebody else doing something rather well. And that is quite hard to measure, and so, although they will say that that is how we should work they don’t notice it happening. If it does not have an individual indicator attached to it that is easily measurable and communicable.”

However, one participant felt that some EP professionals were content to focus on outputs rather than outcomes in case the outcomes were not as anticipated:

F1B.P6 “We plan to have conversations with schools about how was last year? What went well, what did not go well, here is the list of children that we worked with how are they doing? Is this one doing alright, did we get this, did we get that? How hard that data is and how much we interrogate to find out what the outcomes were and how much better off the child is now than they were before, is a bit of an open question. I would think we need to be sharper about that part of it. I think a lot of people don’t want to ask the question, because I think they would rather not know than deal with the consequences of knowing just in case it did not work out and recommended strategies did not have the desired effect.”

It also seemed to relate to constraints of working with a large number of schools with limited hours at the EPs disposal:

I2 “You have to think about the school hours, and how much time does the school have to allocate to this particular child. And that becomes a factor in whether you do longer bits of work or not. It’s all negotiated with the school.”
F1A.P3 “This is a problem with casework rather than systemic work, where you are doing this one hit stuff. There is a potential there for a lot more satisfaction. I think, if you can be more involved in an ongoing basis, but it’s very hard for us to do that.”

This lack of time was a cause of frustration:

F1B.P3 “There are a number of cases where you cannot go back and follow progress and that is disheartening.”

However, when EPs do have the freedom to engage in longer pieces of casework then outcomes are considered and job satisfaction is experienced:

F1B.P5 “I have sometimes worked over a series of weeks with children. For instance, when there’s been bereavement or loss, or something where I have been able to work in more of a therapeutic way. Sometimes I can be involved quite a long period of time, and sometimes assessments can highlight problems that were never noticed before and that can be rewarding. What you need is to be in a school that allows you to do the work and will take things on board.”

And

I1 “When I get to do longer pieces of work where I get to see first-hand progress and the outcome and the successes rather than the kind of one on pieces of work, where I might go away and see them for half a day to write a report and never hear about that child, or how that teacher is managing.”

And

F1A.P3 “Certainly when I'm dealing with children and schools long-term, I feel that there is a lot more job satisfaction there, because I can see the direct impact of the work that I do.”
### 4.4.6 Feeling Valued

It was interesting to note that EPs in the smaller service appeared to feel more valued than those in the bigger authorities:

**I2** “Well, having recently moved from one authority to another. I feel that there is a huge difference in the way that authorities approach their educational psychology services and in this service I feel far more valued and that my work is noticed. More so than I did in the previous service so that is very different. And I don’t know if it is because it is a smaller service and therefore the management is closer.”

While others said:

**F1B.P6** “In a big authority such as this it is easy to get lost. You don’t feel valued as if you just get on with the job no-one really notices. It is only if things go wrong. And those that make the decisions about the allocation of resources, you wonder do they understand what we are doing? Do they value what we are doing? If they did you’d like to think they would facilitate you in your work in a more supportive way.”

And

**F1B.P6** “You can pour a lot of effort into something and most times you’ll not get a lot of recognition for it and it doesn’t do much for feeling valued...I have also had situations where I have set things up and then had them hijacked by others who then take the credit for them.”

Most EPs felt that current developments nationally made them feel less valued than had previously been the case:

**I1** “It is a frustration that there is a shortage of places for trainee educational psychologists, and that the government are not funding training properly which gives a message that you are not really valued at all.”
F1A.P3 “I feel my sense of professional job satisfaction is undercut and that comes from things like, a lack of national policies in relation to educational psychologists. So being in a system where the powers that be whoever they are, cannot get it together to sort out appropriate funding for the training system is not approving of the profession. It sends the message that we can’t quite be bothered with this and we are not worried about it. It does not contribute in that sense, to professional self-esteem that we have things like that happening at a national stage.”

4.4.7 Encroachment of Others

Another frustration articulated by a number of EPs involved the perceived encroachment of other groups into service delivery they felt should be delivered by EPs. One participant commented:

F1A.P3 “Yes, I think the encroachment of others taking things from psychologists is a common theme of dissatisfaction, but how frequently it happens I don’t know, but I suspect it may become more of an issue given the current economic climate.”

Another EP felt this had been a growing issue over the past few years:

I1 “As other professions have come on-stream, particularly in areas such as severe learning difficulties, behaviour management, early years and increasingly clinical psychology it’s impacted on us. We sometimes find that we are now casting around, and looking to try to see how different and distinctive we are.”

However, again there was a feeling shared by at least six participants that if areas of the profession were eroded and lost to other professionals this may in part be due to the way the profession had responded to change. One manager commented as follows:

MI2 “I think we’ve not always been as a profession the best at articulating our role or marketing ourselves. We are not always very media savvy. I don’t mean give it away because we do give it away but we don’t always seem to persuade people that psychology can be really useful, that it
makes sense. Then we complain when it's snatched from us and someone who can articulate it does so.”

F1B.P4 “A range of different things there that tell me that as a professional group we are responsible for perpetuating some of that perception of the educational psychologist. I think that we have missed an opportunity. I think that we could have been very instrumental in making changes within children's social care. But we seemed to have missed the opportunity that would benefit children, particularly children looked after.”

4.4.8 Not Making a Difference

One frustration that was mentioned in most data collection sessions related to the lack of impact EPs felt they had on children’s lives. There was widespread agreement for the comment made by one EP:

F2.P5 “You don't feel as if you're having a direct impact on children and young people and families as you would like.”

Many felt that this was due to the way services are delivered. For instance one EP felt:

F1B.P3 “It's the children who get the least input, because they think ‘Well they have seen the EP so we can tick that box’ even though they often don't follow through on the agreed strategies and you won't get to see them again. Then they just lump the child onto a support assistant who is often the least qualified person working with children in schools and that often means that they don't get enough time with the teacher.”

One EP also felt that EPs had been attempting to write shorter reports for a number of years and had been resisting the role of “gatekeeper to resources”. However, there was widespread agreement that the profession still had some way to go to achieve this:

MI2 “We are still, for all our talk about systems, tied into lots of procedures. Where we are gatekeepers. Give me a report. It doesn't matter what the report is. Just give me the report, and no one is
interested in anything else. The outcome is the piece of paper. So, people are still writing lots of statutory advices, still writing pieces of advice for other panels. All other sorts of provision and nobody is interested in outcomes except having a piece of paper.”

Four EPs questioned the real impact that a psychological advice has for the child and family:

F1B.P6 “And so rarely once they have a statement do we carry on having a positive involvement, and you just feel quite negative when it's finished, a finished piece of work, and it's not a finished piece of work at all for the child. It's just the beginning of the work really.”

Similar views were shared by others:

F1B.P3 “You are just there to rubberstamp it.”

One EP also expressed the view that research carried out by EPs sometimes had little impact:

MI2 “I think an example is the research that we did on exclusions. We did a piece, but initially we did not think we had done enough for our satisfaction. We then completely rewrote it and it was considered to be splendid. But it wasn't circulated to the schools that they said they would circulate to so it was a bittersweet experience and ultimately had little impact.”

4.4.9 Lack of Recognition

Most EPs also expressed frustrations that others often did not appear to recognise the contribution that EPs could or did make. One participant summarised it as follows:

I1 “There are lots of things that people hand you back almost, that are psychology, and there's a sense of missed opportunities. Running through a continuum, right up to people handing you back pieces of work that you've actually done yourself saying, ‘Have you seen this?’ and you say ‘Yes well, I wrote it.’ So there's that frustration with the job.”
Another EP put is as follows:

**F2.P6** “I think many of us feel frustrated about not being recognized. If people don’t recognize what we do, and yet maybe we feel a bit self-important as if they should. We don’t tell them about it and demonstrate it at every turn, what’s different, what isn’t common sense about psychology. Even if it is common sense, how useful it is to have it put in this way. In a sense you can forgive people for feeling as if it’s just out there for everyone to use. So, that can be a frustration.”

### 4.4.10 Distributed Teams

An area of considerable job dissatisfaction for some participants involved the distribution of an EP team and what was perceived as a direct threat to professional identity. One of the local authorities involved in the study had recently experienced frustrations when the team was relocated to a large open plan office. A number of teams used this space and were required to “hot desk”. This proved a frustration for the members of the EPS who felt that the team would be scattered around the office dependent upon the time of arrival of individual members:

**I1** “There does not seem to have been any acknowledge of the need for informal relationships in formal professional relationships, to feed the work and to help you develop the work and to feel secure and get support.”

When discussing how the new office might work one participant felt that getting support from colleagues:

**F1B.P3** “Would take more time, which of course is at a premium for us anyway. You can’t just do it in passing. I don’t think we would get there, because you can’t do it by e-mail. You have to do it by talking to somebody and asking them face-to-face. You would say, ‘I did not know what to do today’ and that person might say ‘I have some resources on that issue, here you go.’ but it’s all informal, but it helps.”
4.4.11 Stress and Anxiety

In most data collection sessions the topic of stress and anxiety for EPs was discussed. At an individual level one participant talked about the link between personal organisation and stress:

**F1A.P3** “I think stress and time management is personal to the individual depending upon how well organised they are, and I think most of us are very well organised. There may be one or two, who are less so. But I think if you are organised, then it's not stressful. okay, there is always heavy caseloads that can becomes a stress, but I don't think that's the actual managing of it.”

At least five participants felt they brought stress upon themselves with one stating:

**F2.P6** “Personally, I am my own worst enemy. I want to get everything done in a timely way. I put myself under pressure to get that done, so it can bring stress, but I feel that is my responsibility. I have got to do it. I have got to be seen to be responding really quickly.”

While another thought that a degree of stress was positive:

**MI2** “A certain amount of stress in any job is needed in order to get the best out of you. It is when it gets to a level where it affects your performance, that it becomes detrimental. And I suppose that the volume of work that we are expected to do, when that reaches that. That's when the stress level gets beyond what is necessary for optimal performance.”

Others also viewed a degree of stress in a positive light:

**I4** “Because if you like challenges and you thrive on stress and that mental stimulation you will get a lot from that sort of challenging work.”

A more experienced EP stated:
I1 “I’m more comfortable and happy in my job now than I was a couple of years ago and then a couple of years ago, before that. There was an anxiety about starting out in defining what you do.”

Other EPs who had been doing the job for some years also talked more about challenge being viewed as a positive rather than stress provoking:

MI2 “Some of the work is challenging, but then we are psychologists, and we are often the last person to be involved in quite a long road. Tricky cases can also be the most rewarding and most satisfying things providing you have the time to do them properly.”

However, many felt that the workload was such that unhealthy stress was inevitable:

F1A.P3 “There is no shortage of stress in my world. I think that a lot of the stress comes about through the amount of work that is required, rather than the type of work, so it is more about the quantity rather than the quality or the nature of the work.”

I3 “The stress is in trying to get through everything. The size of the workload can also impinge on satisfaction and cause stress. The actual volume of work, when it becomes uncomfortable then job satisfaction gets affected.”

Stress was not just linked to the volume of the work but other aspects such as having to say “no” to people:

I1 “Stress is related to supply and demand. There is too much demand. Lots of children who need to be seen by an EP but can’t be seen because there aren’t enough EPs. So managing that is stressful, because you are having to say no to deserving cases, dealing with very angry and upset people, being shouted at, being sworn at, being told you are a bad person.”

There were also discussions of how stress was reduced by utilising team support:
F1B.P2 “I do think that having responsibilities for your own caseload brings a feeling of stress that it is your responsibility to get the work done and we have talked a lot of trying to recognise that actually this is a team resource. We have that now at a monthly meeting, we generally say, should we have a little bit of redistribution, but we manage our own schools essentially. And at the team meeting you see who is having difficulties because we feel the schools really need an equal kind of service or waiting the same length for a referral to be seen. So that's the idea behind that and also to take the stress off colleagues.”

4.5 Job Satisfaction

The theme of Job Satisfaction broke down in to nine subordinate themes. These were Match, Making a Difference, Being Part of a Team, Relationships, Variety, Development, Comfort Zone, Process and Status. Individuals in all interviews were asked what job satisfaction meant to them. Many felt it was difficult to define as “a lot of it is vicarious.” Another participant stated:

F1B.P2 “I think job satisfaction isn't a global thing. I think it's situational. It's a bit like self-esteem, isn't it? It's a bit nebulous to talk about how satisfied you with your job? I'm very happy with certain things. I'm very unhappy with lots of things and some are in the middle.”

Others felt it was about “internal processes and emotions, interests and curiosity.” or “feeling good about your work.” However, there was a general feeling that it would be “difficult to generalise, because different people get satisfaction from different areas.” and that “There are clearly individual differences with these things.”

I1 “It is how each individual defines job satisfaction as well, I suppose it might be relative to their previous experiences. If you have a really amazing job before this one you will always be comparing this job to your previous one.”
One participant summarised feelings that were expressed by many of those interviews, explaining the accumulative and multifaceted nature of job satisfaction:

**MI3** “For me, job satisfaction is about a feeling of energy or not lack of energy. Although you can be tired from having done a good piece of work. There is what I will describe as marathon energy. Where you got to the end of a marathon, and you might be knackered, but it's a good feeling. The outcome is something which is motivating, which is satisfying. You may not notice it, it may just be part of the air that you breathe, but you notice when it's not there. You don't notice when it is there just when it's not there. It may be pieces of work you've done. You measure that against your own standards. ‘That was a good piece of work.’ It could be something somebody said. Things which you said a long time ago, a lot of them are accumulative things. Of themselves you might not go ‘Hmm that was alright’, but they build to a feeling of well-being and a reason to come here on a Monday morning, other than I'm getting paid, because I believe if you haven't got that and are just being paid you just wouldn't do it, you would go somewhere else. So a lot of that is about the things you are asked to do. The nature of them. The number of them. The frequency of them, a feeling of agency that one can deal with them.”

When EPs discussed job satisfaction many expressed satisfaction when they felt they had undertaken a piece of work in which they had displayed skills as a psychologist. For instance on participant stated:

**F2.P6** “My work will put me into some areas of conflict, and for me I'm interested in how well I am able to use the skills I have to move things on. How well I can manage to resolve a lot of those issues and help people to move on. That is where a lot of my job satisfaction comes from.”

Other participants made similar comments:
“I am caught in the middle most of the time, and it is how well I negotiate through all the various issues and how well I think through the work that I’m taking on........and I suppose that is where a lot of my job satisfaction comes from.”

EPs discussed particular skills whose use gave them job satisfaction such as relationship building, group facilitation and listening skills. For instance:

“It’s also being a good listener almost like a form of counselling. You are helping them to express what they want to express to people they don’t feel they can express them to.”

However, many EPs explained that problem solving was a particular skill whose use leads to job satisfaction:

“My job is about identifying where barriers are and I get my kicks from solving those problems, overcoming those barriers, enabling others.”

“I get satisfaction from overcoming problems and barriers.”

“One of the strengths of being an EP is that you get to develop your own problem solving skills.”

“Not just the problem-solving in schools but in a variety of settings.”

This seemed to be particular to being a skilled psychologist rather than just a skilled professional:

“Being reflective is part and parcel of the skills that we have as psychologists anyway, but some of the work takes me into realms where you have to look at different psychological theories to see which way of approaching things is likely to really influence the outcome. So yes, I think I use the skills of a psychologist in all the work that I do and that also gives me a great amount of job satisfaction.”

However, several felt that it was sometimes easy for EPs to underestimate the skills they bring to a situation:
MI2 “We sometimes take the psychology we know for granted but we need to use it not just with the situation but with the people, particularly in dealing with them.”

One EP gave the following example of EPs taking their knowledge for granted:

F1B.P2 “The other day [a colleague] was saying I have received this request for involvement saying that this child is a nightmare on the carpet. When you put her on the carpet, she will kick out and hurt other children, whereas at other times she is fine. We looked at each other and said, ‘let’s not put her in that situation.’ It may not be rocket science to us but it is for other people. And it’s being able to see that and we are lucky that we are able to see things from a distance and we can have an impact and say, ‘What is it about carpet time that is causing the problem?’ So for us it’s just common sense, but for other people it can sometimes be very difficult for them to see the obvious.”

4.5.1 Match

At least a dozen EPs also appear to experience job satisfaction when the work they are doing is a good match with what they are interested or believe in. One EP stated:

F1A.P3 “It is something about the nature of the match between what the context is asking for and your skills and interests and feelings of efficacy. So it may be that that person feels very competent and interested in doing that sort of work, but doesn’t feel comfortable or enjoy other aspects of the job.”

Another participant commented:

MI2 “Yes you have to be doing work you are interested in provided it is something that is compatible with the profession.”

There was general agreement in one focus group for the comment:

F1B.P2 “I feel satisfied with casework, groupwork, consultation and other work you get in the educational psychology world providing that I feel that
I have been able to clarify something or gain an agreement of a certain direction being the right one. I don’t just mean my opinion; I mean one that is compatible with all the usual things that we are working with. For instance inclusion, and providing that I have worked in the direction of inclusion rather than exclusion I am usually satisfied.”

4.5.2 Making a Difference

All EPs interviewed agreed that one of the reasons for entering the profession was because they felt it would give them a good opportunity to “make a difference” for children. Although many expressed frustrations when this desire proved hard to deliver, many felt some of the work they did had a positive impact:

F1B.P1 “Well at a basic level [job satisfaction] would come from feeling that you have done something that makes a difference.”

A substantial number of EPs agreed with the above comment and felt that “making a difference” was a significant factor in job satisfaction:

MI2 “Another aspect of job satisfaction would be the intrinsic value of the job. Believing that the job is in itself worthwhile, and that it is a good thing to do it. And that you are, to use that rather hackneyed term, making a difference.....is part of the job satisfaction.”

One EP gave the following example:

I3 “You get in that accomplishment zone, don’t you, where you’ve had a really tricky case with really upset parents, with a really angry school, and you kind of go in and when you have done the work and everyone is calm and happy or maybe not happy, but content, or has a better understanding, you have move things forward and made a difference for that child. For me that’s one of my main sources of satisfaction.”

There was also discussion about which aspects of the work EPs felt had the greatest impact although there was little consensus on this. For instance one commented:
**F1A.P2** “When I am working on casework or with schools I feel I can make more of a direct difference to children’s lives. It is about how well I help the schools and settings to understand the child’s needs.”

Whereas those working at management posts made comments such:

**MI3** “Sometimes you think I’m able to make more of a difference to children’s lives by working with structures, by working with other managers than I am doing what I did working as a main grade EP.”

### 4.5.3 Being Part of a Team

Although a number of EPs enjoyed the autonomy of the job there was also a strong sense that being part of a solid supportive team contributed to job satisfaction. For instance:

**F1B.P1** “It is important that people feel that they belong to a team that is supportive of each other.”

And

**MI2** “It’s about being in a team”

“If you have a team of people they can all bounce off each other and pick each other’s brains in lots of different areas.”

Another EP talked about how important it had been to have team support prior to recent changes:

**MI2** “We had our own offices, and we would always meet for lunch, three or four times a week at 12:30 and that tradition really helped us establish the team strength, and that was an opportunity to get to know each other and to say ‘Well done’ and ‘I really like what you did there’ and I think that foundation we tried to carry on here but it has been difficult.”

Another individual discussed how important team support had been when starting work in the service:

**MI3** “Having had children and moved from Scotland to England so that was quite a difference as well in practice, and I can’t tell you how
valuable it was to be able to just turn to somebody next to me and say 'How do I do this? What do you think of that? Where do I go for that?'
That is the sort of thing that you just... Somebody new coming in, it would make it really difficult it you do not have that readily at hand. It is all very well having a team meeting once a month but it's more than just the induction. It's an ongoing process. It is more than just the practicalities that people are told when they come.”

Other aspects of team strength related to understanding that each team member may have individual strengths that other team members could rely on:

**F2.P3** “I think we do that, really well. I think we have got to know one another, and we each have our own strengths and weaknesses and respect those differences and celebrate them. You would come to me and ask me about lunch time supervision, and we would both ask you [referring to other colleagues] about bullying, and I might ask you about maths, and there is a confidence to do that with one another. We are all able to say, “I don't know anything about this. Can you help me with this?”

**4.5.4 Relationships**
We have already seen that EPs thought approbation linked to having good relationships. However, they also appeared to be an important element of job satisfaction for EPs. The satisfaction seemed to link to creating, building and maintaining the relationships with others. One EP explained:

**F1A.P6** “I think that the contact with the school, with the client is where satisfaction comes for many EPs.”

While another commented:

**F1B.P1** “The different relationships you have. I enjoy working with schools, parents, children etcetera.”

And
I2 “I enjoy going into schools and spending time building relationships with others.”

One EP commented:

F1A.P2 “It is satisfying, if you get the right school, and the right attitude and they are receptive. Then you can really build a good working relationship with them with mutual trust and respect.”

A fundamental component of relationship building seemed to be using psychological skills to work with difficult clients. For instance:

MI2 “I like it when a school or individual who it has been difficult to build a good relationship with slowly starts to thaw. Sometimes you have to keep chipping away, using listening skills, empathising with them, showing you are honest, always appearing upbeat and seeing the best of situations. I generally find that people can only resist that for so long. If you deliver what you promise people come around and you are able to build a strong relationship. With that relationship you can then say things to them that at one time they wouldn’t have taken but now they listen, respect your opinion as a critical friend and are ready to work with you. That’s when you really make a difference for children and that’s when I feel most satisfied in my work.”

4.5.5 Variety

One aspect of job satisfaction that was mentioned a number of times by at least seven EPs was the wide range of work that EPs are involved in. One participant commented:

MI3 “One of the things that attracted me to the job was the variety....It is very nice to be able to do something a little bit different.”

And

F1B.P1 “Working with children, doing lots of different types of stuff with them, having the freedom to be really varied in my approach.”
It seemed that different EPs may have different definitions of variety but providing they perceived experiencing variety this seemed to lead to job satisfaction. For instance one participant commented:

**F1B.P2** “It's about the nature of those and variety of those things, a feeling that job satisfaction is about variety. The variety may be very unbalanced, but that’s okay. And I think, different people have different evaluations of variety. So, I have one colleague who believes very strongly in casework. Lots and lots of casework. That would drive me crackers. So a lot of it is about your interactions with the things that you do.”

Others seemed to thrive on the unpredictability of the work. For instance:

**MI2** “So it's unpredictable, and the utter unpredictability and variety can give you a bit of a buzz.”

And

**F1B.P3** “Sometimes you don’t know what is coming next. I know some people would hate that but that’s what I really enjoy. Knowing that you are just going to have to react and trust yourself that you can deal with a wide variety of situations.”

### 4.5.6 Development

Another aspect of job satisfaction that participants commented on was intellectual challenge and personal development. One participant stated:

**MI2** “You have to use your opportunities and we are a fortunate profession I feel compared with some, continued professional development is usually available, a requirement of the job and registration really. It is satisfying to keep learning.”

Another EP shared this view stating:

**F1A.P5** “When I first came to this authority I was aware that they really took professional development seriously. I have been able to follow my
interests and get extra training that I’ve then been able to apply in my job quickly. It makes you feel skilled.”

Many commented on the need and motivation to keep up to date with literature:

MI2 “I just think there are other areas of the job that I get satisfaction from. It’s not just about being the educational psychologist and going into schools and dealing with teachers or children. There is a whole other aspect to it, reading around issues making sure you know the latest developments.”

And

F1A.P6 “Things such as the reading or the more intellectual side of the job, because that’s part of the satisfaction you get from the job.”

This was linked to a general understanding of the discipline of psychology:

F1A.P2 “You use your general psychological knowledge to search out the right sort of information and take on the implication of what you have been reading about.”

There was also enthusiasm for expanding one’s knowledge base expressed by at least eight EPs:

MI4 “It’s about an interest in people and personal development, and all of those things. You want to answer those questions about why things happen the way they do. Why people behave the way they do, those kind of things and then through your reading you gradually think ‘Yes, I know a little bit more about this than I used to.’”

Many comments demonstrated a high degree of motivation and curiosity for gaining a better understanding in particular areas of interest. For instance:

F1B.P1 “It’s following an interest that you might have. For instance, I am really interested in attachment, so I am always reading around that. And not just thinking about it in terms of the job and not thinking just about this client or this child or this family or this school or whatever. It’s my knowledge of the human condition.”
Another participant stated:

MI2 “Yes, and so alongside that, you are sort of practising or living it and you can read about the theory side of it at the same time and that's sort of the intellectual side of it and so, you might think, ‘What is the theory behind this?’ or ‘What is written about that in psychology?’”

And

F1A.P2 “You are valued by colleagues enough to be invited to face the academic side of the world and that is very gratifying.”

The intellectual challenge of the job was a common theme throughout the interviews. One participant felt that:

I1 “I just find the job intellectually satisfying, which maybe isn’t the case in some other professions, or even other authorities. I think in our authority I have been lucky in that respect. I think, generally speaking, we are lucky in that we have really intellectually challenging work and we are valued because it gives us a good overview, an ability to see the big picture when others may not.”

There was also widespread agreement for the following comment:

MI2 “I'm not sure I would be expanding my knowledge the same way if I was doing another job.”

4.5.7 Comfort Zone

It is interesting to note that a small number of EPs talked about being involved in work they felt comfortable with rather than seeking out challenges. One EP jokingly stated:

MI2 “There is nothing so comforting as a rut.”

However, while many EPs felt that challenge was a source of satisfaction, for some EPs a source of satisfaction was completing solid and steady work that they felt comfortable with. For instance:
F1A.P5 “I might be unusual and expressing an unpopular view but I actually quite like case work and statutory assessments. There is a process, I understand it well and there is an end result to it. It’s also the main reason the local authority employ me. When everything else loses funding they will still need statements.”

Another EP felt that simply getting through the working week without attracting negative attention was a source of satisfaction:

I1 “A component of job satisfaction is not feeling that one has won the approval of anyone else necessarily. But in some circumstances it might have been avoiding the censure of others. So, you might look back upon your year and think ‘phew I made it. I did not necessarily attract any plaudits, but then, I did not get myself into deep water either and managed to get all the work done that I set myself and although I am neatly in the middle here. I am not attracting either criticism or praise.’ Well that’s a sense of job satisfaction that I’ve got through things.”

4.5.8 Process

There was universal agreement that EPs get a great deal of satisfaction from the process of carrying out a piece of work rather than the end result. One EP summarised this as follows:

MI4 “Personally I tend to deal in analogy and one analogy that really works me is the difference between taking a photograph and doing a painting. The painting might not come out absolutely brilliantly, but you have to engage a whole lot more actively in order to do a painting than you do to create a photograph. By doing the painting you are engaged in the process of looking very carefully at things and really putting yourself into it. You probably get more out of that process than you would just taking a photograph. Even though the photograph might be a more accurate picture it’s the process of engaging with it which is important and perhaps more creative.”
Another stated:

**F1A.P2** “It’s about engaging as an individual in the process. That is my most satisfying work. You relate to people at a deep level sometimes and that can help change your perception and theirs. It’s that gestalt thing of the whole being more than the sum of the parts. When you engage in process something often happens that is difficult to capture..... But you just know it’s useful without being able to describe how or why. It’s backed up by research too. For instance, there is Lambert’s pie¹ where the relationship was shown to a major factor in therapy. I think it’s the same kind of thing we do as EPs when we engage with process.”

### 4.5.9 Status

The status of the profession was also discussed in terms of job satisfaction. One manager felt that job satisfaction was:

**I1** “Partly about status, partly it’s about where EPs are represented.”

Other EPs agreed that status was important to the profession. There was a feeling that the status of the people choosing to consult with EPs was an indication of the status of EPs themselves. For instance:

**MI2** “You just have to know that there is an educational psychologist at that table, and every so often, a director will come down and ask, what do you think about this and that is a very important, I don’t want the use the word status but they are very important signals about the worth of educational psychologists to others. The fact that those people want to talk to an educational psychologist are important signals. They only have to do it now and again, but they are important signals.”

1 An often cited pie chart in a research paper that considered factors that influence client outcome. The research concluded that the relationship between therapist and client was a highly significant factor (Lambert & Barley, 2001).
Some felt that status was an important factor linked to job satisfaction and not something that was reflected on honestly unless it was removed:

**I2** “If it’s taken away well, you start to wonder where you are in the organisation. Even though nothing else about the job has changed. You start to wonder about, you start to measure yourself against other people in the organisation. So some of it is about status, but some of it is about influence, and it’s about the degree to which educational psychologists voice is being heard in various lofty halls.”

Status was also viewed by some as conferred via academic achievements:

**F1A.P5** “It’s nice to see your name in print sometimes and I suppose that is vanity but it is nice.”

And

**I3** “Now that it is a doctoral profession it will help with status and how we are viewed by others.”

However, others felt that professional status is changeable:

**I4** “The status of the profession comes and goes. At one point we seem to be valued contributors and everybody's friend the next minute we seem to be on the way out. I have seen this happen several times.”

While one EP felt that the current economic climate may impact on professional status:

**F1A.P2** “There were a lot of us who were not totally happy about just providing assessments and numbers but ironically that is the thing that kept our jobs but at the time it is one of the very bizarre things. And it's how things are at the moment it's difficult to know just what is our status at the present time.”

4.6 **Multi-agency working**

A major theme discussed in the interviews related to EPs engagement with multi-agency working. The theme divided into six subordinate themes. These
were Co-located teams, Multi-agency Teams, Always worked in Multi-Agency Ways, Multi-Agency Relationships, Multi-Agency Working in the Future and Professional Identity.

4.6.1 Co-located teams

One aspect of this was co-located teams. Overall there appeared to be a great deal of scepticism in relation to co-located teams as a way of enabling professionals to work together. One participant commented:

I4 “When I worked in another authority, we were in the same building as social care, and I don't think it made much difference in terms of how much we work together. So my experience of co-located teams is not good to be honest.”

One participant summarised why he felt co-located teams have not worked well for the profession so far:

F1A.P4 “I think co-located teams are a good idea but in practice it doesn't matter if your colleagues are next door or in another building. If you do not pick up the phone, or make an effort to communicate with them. If you do not walk through and communicate with them it doesn’t really matter. I think one of the things with co-located teams is there needs to be a good internal multi-agency structure to go with it. If it is left up to individuals as to how it happens, when it happens, it will never be a regular and viable thing. We've seen this with social services, time and time again, and it's caught them out and got them in the media. The structures are there in theory, the protocols are there in theory. Why do they go awry? They go wrong, because individuals are not picking up the phone or not doing the things they need to do. So it is a nice idea, but it is very difficult to get it to work well in practice. There is also the tensions between what social services think they are responsible for, what clinical psychologists think they are responsible for, what EPs think is their role etcetera. There are a lot of egos that get in the way of it working if you just put people together and say get on with it.”
There also appeared to be a great deal of resentment when co-located teams had been put together without consultation with EPs. All participants in one focus group explained that they had recently been forced to work in a co-located team without discussion:

**F1A.P2** “We are at the moment, sitting within this big room. We are co-located and we may shortly be forced to hot desk. Well, I can’t see it working as you are going to be in a different part of the room to your colleagues, and you are not going to have that feeling of team but it will force people to work in isolation rather than closer together.....We are based together but we don’t really co-work very much.”

Another member of the team explained:

**F1A.P4** “We are being told, this is what you do, you keep your desktop clean. You put your paper here you don’t put your paper there....But that's the philosophy of it all, that you don’t nest, that you don’t have your own desk, that you will hot desk. As far as possible without any thought to what that actually means. They say it will force professionals out their silos and make us work together...I’m all for that if it’s done in consultation and professional needs are considered. They call it an efficient way of working. Well it might be, if you are selling insurance.”

### 4.6.2 Multi-agency teams

However, there was widespread enthusiasm for multi-agency teams with clear roles and remits. One EP explained how this seemed very different to co-located teams:

**MI5** “In this particular team various colleagues have had experience of being part of multi-disciplinary teams, actually properly integrated and that actually did have a functional change. In terms of job satisfaction. In other words, does being part of a multi-disciplinary team contribute to my job satisfaction as an educational psychologist? Yes it would, given the right team. Given that, it wouldn't be an absolute definite every time. Well, I mean, there is good research showing what makes good multi-professional teams. If those things were in place, a manager with a clear
vision, team members who get to know each other, etcetera. If those things are in place, then it can be very rewarding and enjoyable to work in a multi-agency team.”

Others who had worked in multi-agency teams also spoke positively:

I4 “Oh yes, I have worked in some very good multi-agency teams. Yes, I have enjoyed working in teams. I would make a distinction that it hasn’t necessarily always been great, but often it has been good.”

And

F1A.P2 “I do find it satisfying when you get that opportunity to work with other professions, but I don’t think we get that much opportunity in this authority”

There was also a sense that EPs can learn from other professionals in multi-agency work:

F1A.P4 “And all sort of work that some of us have done with clinical psychologists has been quite good, hasn’t it. I have found it very useful, because they come from a psychological perspective, but it is a slightly different perspective. More family oriented I think, so, that is satisfying.”

And

F1A.P2 “When I am working with somebody like a paediatrician doing an autism assessment or working with somebody from a different profession....that does bring a richness to the thing that you wouldn’t have if it was just the educational psychologist....So, I quite like that and I do find that I enjoyed doing that.”

Another benefit for EPs working in multi-agency teams is that it encourages EPs to ensure they are confident in their opinions and decision making:

I4 “I have worked for the child and adolescent mental health team for a period of time and it’s very different working in a multi-agency team from working in a team where everybody comes from the same area. You
have to be far surer of your ground because you are up against people whose perceptions may be very different to yours.”

There was a sense that EPs have a great deal to offer in multi-agency teams:

I3 “Educational psychologists are taking leadership roles in the directions those teams are going. And that has been very useful” and “I think EP’s have a lot to offer and can gain a lot from working in a multi-agency context. A good analogy, I heard is EPs are like the icing on the cake. They are a luxury. You don’t have to have them but boy do they make the cake look and taste a lot nicer. They gel, the whole thing together.”

One of the reasons put forward for this linked back to process:

F1A.P2 “I think EPs because we emphasise looking at processes and personalities and not just at content or what people can deliver. I think that our unique contribution is in that area, so I think multi-agency working when it is managed properly is very good and very positive and EPs can do that very well.”

However, not everyone felt positive about multi-agency working. At least seven EPs felt that multi-agency working was expensive, reduced accountability and inefficient. For instance one EP stated:

I1 “The efficiency was vastly reduced because you spent a lot of time being in teams talking about work, rather than engaging with the teams in work. Now, some of that talking about work is important, but multi agency work is expensive, and I think you have to have good evidence that it is worth doing in that way. Or are there other ways which are more effective and efficient.”

And

F1A.P3 “In my experience it takes an awful long time for people to gel as a team. Really, almost 2 years before we really did. And before they really understood anything other than a medical perspective. You know, before we’d got to the point where they understood an interactionist perspective. I don’t feel we really achieved a great deal.”
There was also frustration expressed at the need to develop a common language in multi-agency teams:

**MI2** “The language has evolved for a very good reason but it becomes very difficult to understand people’s systems. I went to meetings and found it very difficult to understand the language, because that language has grown as a shorthand to the need to fulfil local government agendas.”

One participant felt that professional language served another distinct purpose:

**F1A.P2** “With a common language you get broad brush strokes and lose the nuance. You end up with language that nobody can disagree with but with little depth. I think it’s wrong to beat people around the head and say everyone is in silos. People got there for a reason. It’s not because of a theory of nasty minds, because they want to be there. They got there because of the increasing specialisation. The language is because they need to communicate in that language, because their work has become so specialised and detailed.”

### 4.6.3 Always worked in Multi-Agency Ways

Many EPs who had been in the profession for a number of years expressed the opinion that they had always worked in multi-agency ways. However, one participant felt that the way it is implemented now is not as effective as it used to be:

**MI5** “We feel that we have always worked in multi-agency way. It is an approach we have always embraced. I think it looks very different in this incarnation. I think the focus is too heavily on meeting, and too light on people actually doing things with children, and it feels very frustrating, because sometimes you are expected to come to a series of meetings all called by different people about the same thing. And then you find that you are struggling to have time to actually go and work with the children and the people who care for the children and teach the children.”
At least 10 participants agreed that multi-agency working was not a new idea to the profession:

**F1A.P2** “Things have not been so very different. I have always worked this way, and now that other people say this is a good idea too I’ve carried on regardless. Whatever is happening above we still have to do the work. So we get on and do it so it hasn’t impacted. It has impacted in that there are now different meetings, and more of them. But the job itself has not changed substantially.”

And

**I4** “You have to work with other people anyway, I think there is this idea that it was a new world order after Every Child Matters, well it just so wasn’t. In 1980 working in Scotland, I worked more closely with social workers then than I have ever done since. If little Jimmy had a social worker I would get to know that social worker very well and we would work together. Speech and language therapists were in the building with us, a child psychiatrist was down the road. We were doing joint family therapy with a child psychiatrist. So, this idea that Every Child Matters was a new world order is just not true.”

Many participants agreed that the impact of legislation on the profession following ECM had been limited:

**MI6** “I think the reality of life for an EP is that there has been very little change in the last five to 10 years really. Our core business is still delivering a service to schools, delivering a time allocation, ensuring a service level guarantee, assessing children, predominantly being a gatekeeper to resources, and hopefully doing the odd bit of intervention and systemic work to try to move things on for children and schools. I think that has kind of happened entirely separate and regardless of the greater structural changes like Every Child Matters, and all the rest of it.”

And
F1A.P2 “Some of the government agenda I don’t think have had that much of an impact.”

However, one EP felt that the legislation had been useful for the profession in validating what EPs were already doing:

I4 “The legislation in a way had an enabling role. I think we are now working towards developing that role, working a lot more with social care colleagues, working a lot more multi-agency but for me a feature of Educational Psychologists’ work for a long time, has been multi agency. A key feature has been consulting with lots of people about the child. You may have to pull it all together. That’s what educational psychologists used to do and that still goes on, we still pull teams together around the child. But that’s what we always did. However, the legislation led to ideas about working in multi-agency ways, the CAF for example as a single point of drawing together information. That has been really very useful.”

Another participant echoed this point:

F1A.P2 “I think things like Every Child Matters have impacted, and helped frame some of what we do. Some of the legislation has been very positive, and it’s highlighted that actually that individual piece of work that we have done is or should be valued, because it is every child matters.”

4.6.4 Multi Agency relationships

Over half the EPs had experience of multi-agency working. They talked about the importance of building good relationships and of opportunities to learn from others. One said:

I4 “I have found it satisfying to actually build a bridge was somebody. When you can actually work with them in producing something. A couple of clinical psychologists I have met, although I don’t always agree with every clinical psychologist I’ve met, but two I worked with I thought were
very good indeed and I thought I learned a lot from them and I was just disappointed that they moved on.”

Another EP commented:

**MI5** “One or two top-class practitioners I've found tremendously satisfying working with them because it's great to see somebody whatever they're doing being really good at their job and I have found that I'll happily sit at their feet. If I can pick up on things that they do then I will try to do it along the lines and I found that hugely satisfying.”

But the important point seemed to be very much about building relationships. For instance EPs commented as follows:

**F1A.P3** “Relating to those people as individuals was very important.”

**I4** “To me it is satisfying if you can actually find one or two people that you can work with jointly. For example, if you can work alongside an occupational therapist or a social worker or a clinical psychologist together and constructively.”

**F1A.P4** “If you can build on your experience and relationships and construct something together I think it's tremendously exciting but I think you are lucky if you are in the right place with the right people at the right time.”

**4.6.5 Multi Agency working in the future**

Over 10 EPs expressed fears regarding working with other professionals in the future, particularly as a result of government cuts and re-organisation. The general feeling was that EPs would be one of a number of professionals vying to undertake similar tasks to other professionals. For instance:

**F1B.P3** “I think there will be rivalry, not so much between psychologists, but between educational psychologists, advisory teachers and other individuals who work directly with children. I could see that happening.”

Much of this anxiety centred around an expectation that more funding would ultimately be devolved directly to schools:
F1B.P5 “I suppose then schools would probably go to the service that they thought could meet the needs of the child but as cost effectively as possible. I would see school choosing the cheapest service as they often don’t really understand what we can bring to the situation.”

This view was shared by others:

F1A.P2 “Whether we are bought it will depend upon the perceptions of the roles that are held within schools.”

While others thought this was already happening:

F2.P1 “You look at the work that is done as part of the targeted mental health in schools project in part of the county and you would say that that is work that should have been done by educational psychologists, but it has gone in another direction.”

This perceived introduction of competition between services was viewed as counter to multi-agency working with people talking about “jostling for position”:

I4 “The way things seem to be going is more the idea of commissioning services, and being in competition with other services, which may put you in a position where you feel ideally, that this child, I would refer on to another service like speech and language, but we want to justify our existence. So actually, I will say, we could do that. If you are in that kind of position where you are worrying about competition with other services then collaboration is less likely to happen.”

However, five EPs thought there may be positives with market driven work:

F2.P3 “I think we are going to be much more market-driven, commissioned work, much more driven by a business mentality. That does have positives in that we are going to have to concentrate on things that we haven’t as a profession done very well. Which is being clear about our role, what we can offer, marketing ourselves and showing a full range of things we can do.”

4.6.6 Professional Identity
Linked to the concerns mentioned above was the issue of professional identity. One EP stated:

**F2.P5** “I don’t think there is any appreciation on the part of managers that it is important to feel a sense of affiliation to your team or profession. They want us to feel a sense of affiliation to X and to children’s services and perhaps to our local area but they do not want us to feel or they do not convey that they want is to feel a sense of affiliation to our specialist colleagues. In fact, they would say that we need to move out of our silos. They seem to think that in order to do good multi agency work we need to dismantle our professions. It leaves you feeling pessimistic about the future of the profession.”

This pessimism was shared by others:

**I4** “Eventually our identity will decay because people will leave and new people will come and there will be less of a sense of team and people will feel less confident with each other because they haven’t had that history.”

**F1A.P2** “It feels as if we are working at maintain an identity despite our situation, rather than working at it within our situation and that our situation is not constructed to facilitate that.”

Others felt that the future would bring closer work with the health service and this too would pose challenges to professional identity:

**MI6** “I think the big challenge in the future is to work with the health service, because I think that research tended to show that social workers were quite happy to lose the previous identity, and they were more concerned with, who is managing the service. Research tends to show that the health service professionals are more concerned with their professional identities, as are we. When we start merging with the child and adolescent mental health team, and that will have to come in the next five or six years then that will challenge both their and our professional identities.”
4.7 Summary of results

Below is a brief summary of the five themes presented in the previous sections.

The theme of Approbation broke down in to three subordinate themes. These were who provides approbation? Feedback received and relationships. Participants identified a number of sources for gaining approbation including senior and line managers, supervisors, colleagues, school staff and parents. They also discussed a number of barriers to receiving approbation including a perceived lack of understanding of the EP role by others. The specificity of feedback appeared to correlate with the degree of impact it had for individuals. Constructive criticism was also welcomed while frustrations were voiced that in some situations there was no right of reply. The quality of the relationship also appeared to directly link with the quality of approbation given. This included relationships with colleagues and consideration of collaborative working within EP team and schools.

The theme of Autonomy broke down in to five subordinate themes. These were Personal Organisation, Work/life Balance, Who is the Client, Individual Personality and Locus of Evaluation. Participants agreed that a high level of autonomy within the profession has both advantages and disadvantages. When considering personal organisation most felt that EPs organise their work load effectively and that this is a vital aspect of the role. However, when discussing work/life balance a substantial number felt that boundaries between home and work were difficult to maintain and that even well organised EPs found themselves working evenings and weekends. Autonomy was also viewed as important as there appeared to be a lack of clarity around identifying the client. It was interesting to note that many participants wondered if there are particular character traits that drew individuals to the profession and led them to work in certain ways. However, some felt the doctorate level training was more of an influence. This particularly related to autonomy when discussing the internal locus of evaluation that EPs placed upon their work. There was disagreement about the extent to which EPs look to others to provide approbation and the impact of personal motivation.
The theme of Job Dissatisfaction broke down into 11 subordinate themes. These were Frustrations, Managing Expectations, Bureaucracy, Resources, Outcomes / outputs, Feeling Valued, Encroachment of Others, Not Making a Difference, Lack of Recognition, Distributed Teams and Stress and Anxiety. Many frustrations were discussed including perceived restrictions from employers, bureaucracy, constraints, lack of review, the role of the EP in statutory work and lack of opportunity to practice psychology. EPs also found it challenging to manage the expectations of others. This was seen as due to mixed clients, mixed expectations, historical expectations, lack of time and variety in EP practice. Bureaucracy was mentioned in all participating authorities. There was general apathy to perceived regular changes to organisational structures, systems that stifled communication and top down approaches to management. Lack of resources including accommodation, materials and even colleagues appeared to be a growing area of concern. There also seemed to be a belief that there was still a focus on outputs such as reports rather than outcomes. Frustrations also surfaced when discussing feeling valued. It was suggested that changes to service, lack of funding for training and a lack of acknowledgement for work undertaken were all contributing factors. A growing anxiety was the perceived encroachment of other professionals into what participants deemed was work best undertaken by EPs. Many also felt that much of the work they were asked to undertake made little difference to children’s lives. This caused great frustration given that many EPs said they had primarily entered the profession for this reason. The distribution of EP teams in various guises was linked to a perceived threat to professional identity. There was acknowledgement that the EP role could be challenging and that a degree of stress is inevitable and not necessarily negative. However, many felt that the context in which they currently worked was producing higher levels of stress than they were comfortable with.

The theme of Job Satisfaction broke down into nine subordinate themes. These were Match, Making a Difference, Being Part of a Team, Relationships, Variety, Development, Comfort Zone, Process and Status. A number of EPs felt that the closer the match between the work they undertook and their own personal interests the higher the levels of job satisfaction they
experienced. This was also the case when the work EPs did make a difference to others lives, particularly children. Those who were part of a strong team felt the support given and received from colleagues was a factor in feeling satisfied with their work. This linked to relationships formed when undertaking the role, not only with colleagues but with all individuals that an EP works with. Almost all EPs felt that a benefit of being an EP was the variety of work that they became involved with. There was also acknowledgement that the requirement to continue developing and learning new skills kept the job relevant and dynamic. However, some felt that they worked within their own comfort zone and reported this as a source of job satisfaction. A substantial number of participants thought that engaging in “the process” of a piece of work more than the end result provided job satisfaction. The status of the profession when viewed favourably by others was also cited as a factor linked to job satisfaction.

The theme of Multi-agency working broke down in to six subordinate themes. These were Co-located teams, Multi-agency Teams, Always worked in Multi-Agency Ways, Multi-Agency Relationships, Multi-Agency Working in the Future and Professional Identity. Co-located teams were discussed with a great deal of scepticism with many feeling they did not provide realistic ways to build multi-professional relationships. However, the majority were enthusiastic about multi-agency teams, providing there was a clearly defined role and remit for the work undertaken. Many EPs reported that they had always worked in multi-agency ways and therefore had mixed views about the role legislation had played in changing the ways EPs work. A number of participants felt that multi-agency working provided opportunities to build positive relationships that might not otherwise exist. Anxieties expressed about the changes to the context in which EPs work extended to discussions of how EPs may work in the future. Many felt that the cultural climate was leading to competition rather than collaboration and that this may undermine effective multi-agency working. It was also viewed as a potential threat to professional identity particularly if changes were forced through without full consideration of the potential impact on individual EPs.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This section considers the results and attempts to answer the research questions with reference to the existing literature. Discussion will also focus on the strengths and limitations of this research and emerging recommendations. The overarching aim of the research was to investigate Educational Psychologists’ views of factors that influence approbation, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction when working within multi-agency local authority contexts. 27 EPs participated in the research in a combination of focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Data was analysed through qualitative methods using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phase process of thematic analysis (Appendix E) was employed as the guide for carrying out the analysis together with their 15 point checklist (Appendix F).

The specific aim of this study was to address the following research questions:

1. What do EPs working for local authorities perceive as contributing to their job satisfaction?
2. What do EPs working for local authorities perceive as contributing to their job dissatisfaction?
3. How do EPs working for local authorities get approbation?
4. How is the re-organisation of local authorities affecting EP job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation?

Qualitative methodology was used to explore these questions with EPs in the North West of England. This was with a view to understand the perspective of main grade and senior psychologists working within a variety of EP teams. The participants were all self-selecting and working within three participating LAs.

Many of the factors that SPs have previously identified as being associated with job satisfaction such as peer cohesion, supervisor support, clear task orientation, clarity and the chance to innovate (Kaplan, 1995) were also evident as factors associated with job satisfaction for EPs in this study.

The UK study on career continuation plans (Male & Jensen, 1998) indicated that EPs generally felt satisfied with their jobs. They reported being most
satisfied with administrative support, autonomy, support from colleagues and role clarity. In the current study participants reported that ongoing changes threatened all of these areas to some degree with many reporting dissatisfaction with these key factors. The areas identified as least satisfying in 1998 included time available to complete paperwork and carry out direct work. These were also reported as continuing issues.

Previous research has primarily originated from the US where SPs often work in a different context (Worrell, Skaggs & Brown, 2006). They have also relied heavily on research questionnaires such as the WES (Kaplan, 1995), MSQ (Bloomquist, 2006), TSI (Adkins, 2003) and MBI (Huebner, 1994) most of which have been standardised with a US population. When more qualitative approaches have been employed bias may have been introduced by asking participants to complete questionnaires prior to focus groups. For instance “The Ways of Coping” questionnaire (Breiman, 2001) may have primed focus group participants to respond in a certain way to questions. The lack of literature examining change, growth, satisfaction and professional esteem for EPs the UK (Kelly, Woolfson & Boyle, 2008) also strengthens the justification for this study.

5.2 Research Question 1

The first research question was “**What do EPs working for local authorities perceive as contributing to their job satisfaction?**” It would appear that EPs gain job satisfaction from a variety of sources including their relationships with colleagues and a range of stakeholders. They identified a number of aspects of day to day work that provided satisfaction including, autonomy, feeling they were “making a difference”, the variety of the work they undertook, and process over outcome.

Some aspects of the EP role that provide job satisfaction have been less evident in general literature. These include variety of work, a focus on process over end results and the use of psychological skills to help build and maintain relationships. It was also evident that job satisfaction was a difficult concept to define for many EPs. It was referred to as nebulous, vicarious, situational and difficult to generalise. However, there was widespread agreement that using
interpersonal, analytical and problem solving skills successfully was a major
cfactor in gaining satisfaction with one’s job for EPs.

Autonomy is often cited as a contributing factor for professionals (Arvey, Carter & Buerkley, 1991). However, this appeared particularly important for EPs participating in this study. While this research demonstrates a strong link between autonomy and job satisfaction a significant number of participants felt that EP autonomy was being eroded. The concerns seemed to centre on perceived threats to autonomy for the profession as a whole rather than individuals. This was highlighted by comments such as, it is “not as heterogeneous or discursive as before” and EPs are “moving towards more convergent ways of thinking”. Participants attributed the threat to a perceived inability of the profession to successfully articulate EPs’ full range of skills and abilities to commissioners. It was accepted that this was as a long term issue (Newson, Newson & Gilham, 1983). The increased homogeneity may partially be a consequence of widespread workforce reform (DfES, 2006) within LAs following the Laming enquiry. However, it was felt that a recent change of government and subsequent cuts to LA budgets left the EP profession vulnerable in many ways including threats to professional autonomy.

For participants, autonomy was not simply related to the freedom to choose how to manage one’s time, although this was important. Autonomy included determining the type of work EPs specialised in and the opportunity to exercise creative freedom. Most EPs thought this was a central aspect of the job. However, there was agreement that this led to a tension. Many reported that there was a negative correlation between professional autonomy and approbation from employers, many of whom may not be fully aware of the range of functions the autonomous EP covers. However, without this awareness it would seem unrealistic to expect praise and affirmation. There appeared to be a contradiction in that many of the EPs who said they had no need for approbation reported frustrations that employers did not appreciate the subtle and complex work they carried out. There was also agreement that EPs motivation decreased due to this lack of appreciation by employers. Motivation is considered to be a primary determinant of job satisfaction (Sledge, Miles & Coppage, 2008) and this finding appears to extend to the EP profession too.
who said lack of appreciation made them feel unimportant to the authority which in turn impacted on their performance and satisfaction. It appears therefore that autonomy and a perceived high internal locus of evaluation do not act as buffers for EPs to the extent that some participants implied. Locke’s Range of Affect Theory (1976) would fit well with EP’s views on autonomy on this matter. Autonomy represents an important “value” for EPs and thus its perceived erosion would create the discrepancy that would lead to less satisfaction.

Many participants felt that in the future, managers would be valuing employees far more based upon evidence of effectiveness. It has been argued that psychologists are scientist practitioners (Lane & Corrie, 2006) and therefore well positioned to demonstrate evidence based practice. However, many EPs expressed the view that much of their work was about process rather than outcomes and that this is one of the creative, autonomous aspects of the job that gives them most satisfaction. The doctorate training course that produces the majority of practitioners in the region focuses strongly on therapeutic skills, theories and methods. However, it is not always easy to present quantitative data when engaging in this kind of work. A characteristic related to job satisfaction, particularly for professionals who work with the general public, was building and maintaining good relationships (Collins, Collins, McKinnies & Jenson, 2008). However, for EPs it appeared to be more than simply forming good relationships with clients. Many EPs reported that using psychological skills such as rapport building, empathic listening and paraphrasing to help form the relationships was as rewarding as the relationship itself. This appeared to be an example of EPs taking satisfaction from the process rather than just the end result. One participant used an analogy of the process of producing a painting in comparison to taking a photograph feeling that the actual act of “doing” was the thing that produced most satisfaction. Others talked about the Gestalt idea of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts explaining that such concepts are often difficult to measure. However, there were genuine concerns that comments such as “It’s the art that I practice” will not be well received in austere times in which local authorities are making difficult decisions about services.
It could be argued that autonomy for EPs is an illusion or comes at a price. Research suggests that voluntary and unrewarded overtime workers had a relatively high income and favourable job characteristics (Beckers, Van Der Linden, Smulders, Kompier, Taris & Geurts, 2008). There appeared to be an implicit expectation in all three authorities that EPs would be required to engage in some regular voluntary work for the authority in order to provide the service and meet professional standards they were happy with. EPs report back to clients and commissioners in a number of ways from short letters to detailed reports. However, the freedom to determine the way reports are written actually caused frustrations for many. Many felt pressured to work with a large number of clients yet also write thoughtful, personalised and time consuming reports. The desire to write high quality reports was related to personal professional pride. Others said they did not wish to be compared unfavourably with previous colleagues by schools who completed satisfaction surveys for the LA. This provided many with the motivation for writing reports that took a considerable amount of time to construct. While report writing was widely viewed as down to personal choice, many EPs said that they spent more time writing reports than they were allocated. Many EPs reported working “extra hours” and at weekends with one commenting that “we all do it”. This appears to undermine the general feeling that there is autonomy in the decision. A recent study suggests that perceived heavy workload leads to stress and burnout while perceived autonomy is predictive of lower levels of burnout (Shirom, Nirel & Vinokur, 2010). In a profession in which high levels of workload and autonomy are both reported it would be interesting to study the extent to which one influences the other.

It was interesting to note that EPs reported feeling motivated to carry out work related tasks outside of the working week. One EP stated that he thought the profession was well paid while another felt that working outside of office hours was an expectation he placed on himself. Herzberg’s motivation-hygiene theory states that hygiene factors are extrinsic to the work and include status, job security and salary (Williams, 2008). He claimed that these do not give positive satisfaction, though their absence results in dissatisfaction. Some of the comments from participants would fit with this theory. For instance, one EP
who stated “if my pay and conditions started to be eroded. Then I think that would leech a lot of my goodwill away”.

Many participants felt EPs are reflective practitioners, critical and analytical and these qualities enabled EPs to give themselves realistic feedback and learn from experience. Most felt EPs do not require positive feedback from others for their own self worth or to feel valued. It could be argued that such a position represents individuals whose egos have little influence on their daily lives and who consequently do not require high levels of external positive feedback. However, it could also be argued that the position represents the reverse with individuals feeling they do not require external feedback due to superciliousness. There are potential dangers for any profession that feels that the work they perform is too complex to be understood by others and thereby not amenable to external scrutiny.

For many EPs, educational psychology was not their original profession. Many reported being drawn to the profession because they believed they would have more opportunity to “make a difference”. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that when EPs feel they achieve this aim they report high levels of job satisfaction. Similar findings have been reported in other professions such as doctors in general practice (Gothill, 1998). For EPs this was not simply based on performing individual tasks but extended to a general feeling that the profession as a whole is worthwhile and beneficial to others. This linked to a long term view that working strategically over time with structures and procedures could help shape perspectives and cultures and that this can have a major impact on children’s lives.

An important aspect of job satisfaction in many professions is support from colleagues and feeling part of a team (Carlson, 2009; Hughes, 2006; Tekleab, Quigley & Tesluk, 2009). This is also important for the EP profession. EPs said that it is difficult to find other individuals outside the profession who appreciate the complexity of the problems EPs are involved in. EP teams can provide an environment where ideas are “sparked” and creativity is nourished, valued and encouraged. This is particularly important for EPs because the autonomy in choosing how to approach problems demands an ability to think widely and
creatively. Encouraging creative thinking within a group also acts as a form of immediate approbation from colleagues. As specialists who often feel they are not fully understood, validation from colleagues seemed particularly important.

US studies have shown that variety of role is a source of satisfaction for SPs (Bloomquist, 2006) and the same appears true for EPs. The construct of “variety” had different meanings across services and for individual EPs. Some EPs said they enjoyed variety but only linked this to variety within the constraints of casework. They talked candidly about feeling threatened and unskilled in approaching some of the varied work for which the opportunity often existed. It is not uncommon for EPs to feel anxiety when confronted with the opportunity to apply psychology widely (Fallon, Woods & Rooney, 2010). They talked favourably about the security of comfort zones and steady predictable work. However, many EPs, particularly those in management positions, reported that the unpredictability and the need to “trust yourself” meant they often had to take calculated risks. This was commented on positively with EPs stating that it provided freedom, a “buzz” and satisfaction. Variety was also linked to the need to continually develop knowledge and skills. Continued professional development was viewed as not being as central for many professions as for EPs. There was recognition of this requirement and subsequently good opportunities to continually develop. Some felt this was almost a luxury. Many discussed a love of learning and natural curiosity and felt privileged that this was a requirement incorporated and encouraged as part of the role.

Linked to the intellectual side of the job was satisfaction with good links to universities and therefore better academic links to practice. The academic link was seen to represent a degree of status for the profession and provide a form of general approbation that was perhaps more subtle, implicit and felt rather than explicitly given. Status was important to many participants although some EPs felt that this was not always openly discussed. The majority of EPs concept of the profession seemed to be one of a helping, egalitarian profession aiming to facilitate change and “make a difference”. Therefore, acknowledging the importance of professional status may not sit comfortably with these worthy ideals. However, EPs were very much aware of where they were represented,
the power and influence of the groups to which they were members and if they were consulted by directors and other policy makers. There was also widespread agreement that changing the training from a master’s degree to a doctorate was good for the profession because it would impact positively on status. This is very much in line with Herzberg’s motivation-hygiene theory and a belief that status is an important hygiene factor in any workplace (Williams, 2008). However, some of the longer serving EPs felt that professional status was very much impacted by political agendas. They reported that it is not explicitly commented on by the profession or consciously noticed until it is under threat or taken away.

5.3 Research Question 2

The second research question was “What do EPs working for local authorities perceive as contributing to their job dissatisfaction?” EPs participating in this research reported surprisingly high levels of dissatisfaction. In many of the data collection sessions many EPs were enthusiastic and often reluctant to move on from discussing this area. While group think (Celmer, 2007) may partly explain this, the frustrations were voiced strongly in individual sessions as well as focus groups. The opportunity to discuss dissatisfaction appeared to be cathartic for many and possibly not facilitated elsewhere such as supervision. In a profession that has embraced problem solving methods such as the “Solution Focused Approach”, it is possible that many EPs feel it is no longer desirable or acceptable to utilise supervision to discuss issues in a negative light. It has been suggested that organisational change is an antecedent to stress and negativity in employees (Tvedt, et al., 2009). Therefore, the opportunity to explore change in supervision seems of paramount importance.

While EPs had stated that autonomy was an important part of the role many felt that their LA employers restricted them in their role and left them feeling part of the “SEN industry”. They felt that the central role EPs performed in the statementing process and restrictions from senior management eroded the autonomy that many valued. Many EPs reported a lack of opportunity to work on cases for more than a short period of time, involvement in activities that they
did not feel were a good use of time and in some cases feeling obliged to support child deficit models that they felt had a detrimental effect on the young people they were working with. Many papers critique the deficit model and labelling (Elkins, 2009; Ong-Dean, 2005).

There are a wide variety of stakeholders involved in EP work and it was felt there is also a wide variety of assumptions, preconceptions and expectations regarding the role of the EP. This caused problems when the perspective of the EP differed greatly from that of the stakeholder. For instance, it was reported that school’s expectations of their EP were often restricted to helping to support an application for a statement of SEN or additional funding. It was reported that parents sometimes view EPs as lacking independence, linked too closely with the LA / school or an authority figure with an unarticulated agenda. Some EPs felt that both schools and the LA often held a narrow view of the wide variety of roles EPs are able to perform. However, EPs also reported frustrations that stakeholders often had unrealistic expectations that fall outside of what the EP considered to be their remit. Many participants felt stakeholders often reported that the EP had not met their expectations. However, stakeholders could not define what their expectations had been. This highlights the importance of spending time contracting with stakeholders and teasing out expectations and possibilities early in the process. Contracting is a topic given extensive consideration in counselling literature (Heinssen and Hunter, 1998; Sills, 2006; Worrall, 2006).

The frustration around expectations did not surface in the US studies. This may be due to a range of factors including this research taking place at a time of change. Also, the smaller number of EPs in the UK compared with SPs in the US may account for confusion about the EP role by stakeholders in the UK. The heavy reliance on questionnaires to gain views in US studies may simply mean that the opportunity for this frustration to be identified has not previously existed. In the US many SPs are directly employed by schools and therefore potentially better positioned to negotiate expectations. It could be argued that the UK role is at times more complex than the US and this could also be a factor accounting for the lack of previous literature around this frustration.
Efforts to retain staff should focus on creating positive organisational climates (Cahalane & Sites, 2008). Individuals make sense of organisational change based on how it enhances or diminishes their individual or organisational identity (Sloyan, 2009). However, re-organisation of services appeared to be having a negative effect on job satisfaction. Participants in this study reported that local authority re-organisation was being accompanied by a reduction in available resources, lack of adequate accommodation, inappropriate responses to requests, decisions being taken without consultation and a sense that many EPs were being defined by commissioners in narrow terms.

EPs in all three authorities expressed frustration at local authority bureaucracy and organisational changes. Many long serving EPs had witnessed a great deal of organisation change and expressed apathy about current changes due to a perceived top down approach to organisational change from senior management with little genuine consultation. Research demonstrates that workers are most satisfied when they were encouraged to participate in decision-making on issues affecting them (Gberevbie, 2008). It was felt that when change occurred there was never enough time to establish routines, relationships and adapt practice before another re-organisation was announced. Another reason for indifference was that EPs are generally busy people with little time to ensure that they have a good understanding of unstable organisational structures. Frustration with organisational change has also been highlighted as a factor for US based SPs (Jimerson & Oakland, 2007). However, there was also recognition that the apathy may mask apprehension particularly with recent changes resulting from cuts to service. One EP thought it paradoxical that trained psychologists were engaging in defensive "head in the sand" behaviour. This was because many had undertaken some cognitive behavioural training and attempt to help clients recognise similar behaviour in them and provide alternative perspectives.

Previous research has highlighted lack of resources as a factor associated with job dissatisfaction in a range of professions (Kanai-Pak, Aiken, Sloane & Poghosyan, 2008; Otero-Lopez, Bolano, Marino & Pol, 2010). A number of EPs reported that they often felt they had to “make do” with the tools they had at their disposal although these were often not the best tools for the task. This
seemed to be due to a number of issues. Firstly, many EPs reported that high volumes of work left little time to prepare adequately. Secondly, accessibility to resources was also cited as an issue. In one authority resources were stored in an inconveniently located building away from the main office. In another authority EPs had a limited numbers of commonly used assessment tools. Lastly, many felt strongly that their role was to identify need and that it was for others to determine how those needs could be met. However, ongoing cuts to services meant that the resources required to meet those needs were not always readily available. Some felt that by identifying and articulating needs they were setting up expectations in others that may increasingly not be met. This caused anxiety, frustration and an ethical dilemma for some.

Another frustration expressed by participants related to the difference between outcomes and outputs. While there was general agreement that EPs felt outcomes were a more realistic measure of “making a difference” there was an acknowledgement that they found it difficult to resist the culturally valid measure of outputs. Some acknowledged that often reports were the outputs for EPs in LAs rather than reviewing the impact of interventions over time. It was felt this related to EP’s anxieties particularly at a time of cuts to service. Some felt that if outputs were viewed favourably by commissioners then it was in the EP’s interest to produce them. There was also a feeling that EPs are often pressured to carry out one off pieces of work, compromise on how they intervene and do not have the available resources to provide adequate training to those implementing the recommended interventions. This mirrors some of the findings from US studies (Huebner, 1992). It was felt this could reduce the impact of the interventions leading to less successful outcomes than desired. This seemed to be a professional dilemma. The HPC Standards of conduct, performance and ethics to which EPs abide states that registrants must “act in the best interest of service users” (HPC, 2009, p.3) and “communicate properly and effectively with service users and other practitioners” (HPC, 2009, p.3). It could be argued that the expectations of LAs may require EPs to compromise on these standards.

Some EPs explained that by enquiring about outcomes they may not hear the successes they originally hoped for and that this may reflect negatively upon the
However, a number of EPs engage in direct work over time with clients and reported successful outcomes. Nevertheless these EPs often felt frustrated that this work was usually qualitative, process based, complex, subtle and difficult to measure. The concern was that it was therefore potentially difficult to communicate to commissioners.

With any small sample it is difficult to generalise. However, it was interesting to note that those in the smaller authority reported feeling more valued than those in the bigger authority. One theory suggested was that in the smaller authority the EPs appeared to have more direct access to senior management. Research suggests that the more empowered the employee feels the higher the levels of satisfaction (Bhargava & Kelkar, 2000). One EP who had worked in both a large and small authority reported that it was easy to feel lost and anonymous in a large authority. It was reported that in large authorities EPs sometimes loses credit for the ideas and initiatives they devise. It was reported that often the credit for the original proposal gets lost or “hijacked by others”. There was a general feeling that the profession as a whole was not well valued. When the interviews took place many felt frustrated due to confusion about the future funding for the university training courses. A number felt that this impacted on professional self esteem and sent out “the wrong signals” nationally.

Another frustration expressed by a sizable number of participants concerned the perceived encroachment of other professionals. This is perhaps not surprising given that the distinctive role of the EP has been much debated (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Cameron, 2006; Farrell et al., 2006). This seemed a particular concern given the economic context in which the research was carried out. A number felt that many of the roles carried out by EPs could be done by other “less expensive professionals” and that in a period of austerity this made EPs vulnerable. There was also a belief that what was cynically referred to as an “SEN industry” had evolved. It was reported that new professions such as behaviour specialists and inclusion services had been created in response to an increased market. Many felt that some of these services also felt vulnerable. It was theorised that a consequence of this was that implicit boundaries between various professionals were no longer
respected and that many were marketing themselves as providers of a wide array of services including some most often undertaken by EPs. Many felt this was a “growing issue”. The concern about professional boundaries has also been identified as an issue for health care professionals (Grant, Huby, Watkins, Checkland, Mcdonald, Davies and Guthrie, 2009; Prowse and Prowse, 2008; Cameron, 2011). A number of participants in this study expressed frustration that they felt the changes were leading to a culture of mistrust, competition and ill feeling towards the very professionals EPs were being encouraged to work closely with. However, there were those who felt that complacency, lack of forward thinking and EPs inability to successfully articulate their distinctiveness had contributed to this issue.

When discussing job satisfaction EPs explained that “making a difference” was a large contributing factor. It is therefore not surprising that EPs felt frustrated if they felt their work had little impact. Locke’s Range of Affect Theory would predict that the erosion of a strong EP value such as this would have a significant impact on levels of job satisfaction. This appeared to be the case with EP involvement in many statements of SEN. As previously mentioned, some felt that producing a statement report required them to provide a deficit model account of a child’s difficulties rather than focusing on strengths. Some thought it incongruous that strategies to support the most vulnerable children were usually implemented by the least paid, trained and qualified members of staff within schools. Some EPs also expressed frustration that research carried out in their LAs was often not used. EPs generally felt that when they are able to innovate they can make a difference to children’s lives, but the opportunities to do this are few. Previous research has shown that the chance to innovate is a factor school psychologists associated with job satisfaction (Kaplan, 1995).

Supervision was strongly linked with job satisfaction and approbation for many, but for many this did not take place on a regular basis. This was also cited as a frustration by many participants including those who were responsible for providing the service. The main reason given for this was time pressures and the volume of work that EPs were expected to engage with. Social care studies have suggested that lack of good quality regular supervision and casework
pressures have impacted upon the mental health of some social workers (Stanley, Manthorpe & White, 2007).

Lack of recognition for the work that EPs are engaged in was a frustration linked with approbation. It was felt that many had embraced George Miller’s view that psychological professions should give psychology away and had freely distributed psychological knowledge without attempting to impose restrictions. However, many EPs felt that other commercially minded and media savvy individuals were increasingly repackaging psychological ideas for commercial gain. One EP complained that he had recently been asked if he had seen a well received piece of information only to discover that he was the original author. The perceived change in cultural focus was seen as a reason to perhaps re-appraise EPs’ approach to distributing psychological knowledge.

Increased distribution of EP teams was also put forward as a frustration. It was reported that senior management often believed this would force professionals out of “silos” and facilitate more multi-agency working. While most EPs were in favour of facilitating closer relational ties with other professionals there was great frustration expressed at the imposed way in which this was being implemented. For instance, some services providing “hot desking” offices rather than individual desks. Frustrations centred on the perceived need for informal relationships with fellow professionals, the importance of professional identity to EPs and the safeguarding, socialisation and support that EP teams bring to their members. For many the changes were viewed as something to resist and an example of senior management displaying little awareness of the needs of the professional.

Unsurprisingly stress and anxiety were experienced by many of the participants in their day to day work. Research has suggested that organisational change (Bachmann, et al., 2009), workload (Shirom, Nirel & Vinokur, 2010) and role ambiguity (Anton, 2009) all contribute to levels of stress experienced by employees. Many EPs considered that they were well organised and felt that with high levels of autonomy also came a presumption that EPs could organise themselves effectively. Some felt that organised EPs have typically experienced low levels of stress and anxiety and high levels of satisfaction.
This would be a prediction of the Core Self-Evaluation Model (Judge, 1998) which theorises that high self esteem, efficacy and locus of control are related to job satisfaction. It was also acknowledged that a degree of stress may be positive as it could help participants stay motivated and engaged with the work. However, the majority felt that they were being asked to carry increasingly heavy and unrealistic caseloads and this caused unhealthy levels of stress and anxiety. Some also thought a consequence of funding cuts was that they had to increasingly say no to what they considered were deserving cases. This caused them personal anxiety but seemed to lead to school staff increasingly expressing disappointment and frustration. This also served to increase stress levels for the participants.

5.4 Research Question 3

The third research question was “How do EPs working for local authorities get approbation?” Discussions about approbation focused on who EPs receive approbation from, the different relationships that EPs have, the types of approbation they receive and the value placed on them. High quality approbation came from those whom EPs respected and this contributed to participants levels of satisfaction. However, there was also scepticism, doubt and indifference associated with some of the received approbation. Many EPs reported that they were better at evaluating whether or not their work was worthy of praise than others.

EPs reported that working closely with schools is vital to the success of their endeavours with participants making comments such as “schools are key players in influencing outcomes.” It was therefore surprising that discussions about approbation focused on line managers, supervisors and those in management posts rather than schools. Previous research has highlighted that many EPs feel that employers and those they work with often have a very limited view of the EPs role (AEP, 2008). A lack of recognition by employers coupled with the high levels of EP autonomy may explain why EPs focused on managers when discussing approbation. This may be extenuated by the drive within many authorities for greater demonstrations of the value for money various professions bring including psychologists.
Research has previously highlighted the importance of supervision as a means by which EPs gain validation and recognition of the work they have undertaken (Leadbetter, 2000; Leyden & Kuk, 1993). It has been suggested that competency based supervision for EPs should enhance quality by ensuring clarity of role expectations, provide good quality feedback and support continuing professional development (Stratford, 1994). EPs in this study confirmed that these qualities were important and that it is particularly important to gain approbation from someone “with more experience” as this helped foster confidence in the individual EPs practice.

Participants were keen to explore the connection between approbation from team colleagues and job satisfaction. Participants gave examples of giving and receiving approbation both formally and informally within their EPS teams. However, there were concerns that some of these opportunities were being eroded under proposed and new working arrangements. These included plans for large open plan offices, increased multi-agency teams, working from home without an office base, and less frequent team meetings. In referring to these changes one EP felt that those implementing the changes do not “seem to.....acknowledge......the need for informal relationships”. It was felt that in a supportive team, members gave each other approbation and this led to working as an effective unit and higher levels of job satisfaction. These findings are borne out by research from organizational and sports psychology. Studies reveal that members of highly cohesive sports teams experienced higher levels of satisfaction, self-efficacy, motivation and success (Leo Marcos, Garcia Calvo, Parejo Gonzalez, Sanchez Miguel & Sanchez Oliva, 2010; Tekleab, Quigley & Tesluk, 2009).

Relationships were viewed as key to approbation. US studies show that this is also viewed as important to SPs in their day to day work (Vanvoorhis & Levinson, 2006). There was a widespread feeling from participants in the current study that relationships with colleagues were very important. Unsolicited and spontaneous approbation from other team members was highly valued. It was felt that as members of the profession there were unwritten codes of conduct that contributed to the approbation one received from colleagues. This included behaving in a professional manner, keeping promises, being
respectful, building trust and being available to offer support to others. It was interesting to note that participants who reported they were part of teams that worked closely together also reported high levels of meaningful approbation from colleagues. When discussing relationships with schools many felt that meaningful approbation “was earned” and followed an opportunity to prove worth, build trust and often collaborate with individuals. However, it was acknowledged that this takes time and that when an EP is at a school infrequently this can be detrimental to the relationship. It was also noted that EPs work in different ways and have different styles. Therefore, it was felt important that a new EP taking over support for a school is aware of the relationship the previous EP had with staff and their expectations.

EPs also looked to schools for approbation. It was felt that it is important to establish and build on relationships with schools. This may be because EPs reported that schools are important partners in determining outcomes for children. However there was also a desire from EPs that schools would value their input and find the work they did useful. Some participants experienced a degree of cognitive dissonance around this issue. There was a tension that EPs wanted to be viewed favourably by schools yet still had a duty to measure requests for involvement against criteria. They also had to work within professional and local policies and guidelines which may often be at odds with the desires of the school.

Participants discussed a cultural aspect to approbation. They felt that giving and receiving positive feedback is not a very “British” trait. The belief that approbation would not occur naturally was given as the reason given why it is often built into systems such as team meetings and annual staff appraisals. However, it was reported that forced approbation did not have the intended impact or compare with spontaneous approbation. Many EPs felt that attempts by senior management to provide approbation were often seen as staged, an expectation and badly executed. This appeared to have the opposite effect to that intended, often leaving recipients feeling patronised, misunderstood and embarrassed. However, it is probable that many EPs desire approbation from senior management within LAs if they expressed frustration that this was infrequent or misplaced.
It was encouraging that many participants received meaningful approbation from multi-agency working. Watson (2006) has suggested that EPs have a wide range of skills that could be utilized in helping multi-agency teams to establish a shared vision and evaluate outcomes of work. It was therefore encouraging to hear one EP manager explaining how EPs in the service are starting to take leadership roles within multi-agency teams in the authority. However, some participants felt that multi-agency service delivery partners did not always recognize the contribution the EP had made. Some of the skills participants felt were not acknowledged included listening to others, working with multiple perspectives, considering processes and personalities, facilitating and empowering others and contextualizing within a framework of research, theory and evidence. This was perhaps surprising because UK EPs have previously reported that they receive good quality, meaningful feedback from other professionals when they work within a multi-agency teams (Gaskell & Leadbetter, 2009).

EPs felt that meaningful approbation came from those who they respected, who were viewed as congruent, provided constructive criticism and who linked approbation to specific examples of work undertaken. EPs felt that constructive criticism helped them develop their own practice and make them aware of things they may only have had partial awareness of previously. However, they also expressed frustration that they received negative feedback that they felt was unjustified or highlighted a lack of understanding of the complexity of an issue. For example, one service sent out feedback sheets to parents and schools following EP involvement. If negative feedback was received on these EPs generally reported feeling frustrated that there was no right of reply.

5.5 Research Question 4
The fourth research question was “How is the re-organisation of local authorities affecting EP job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation?” This research would suggest that a number of EPs feel quite anxious about the changes taking place in LAs. This was evident by the desire to focus on dissatisfaction and issues related to re-organisation. However,
there was also widespread support for multi-agency working even if the implementation was questioned.

When EPs discussed co-located teams there was scepticism that simply placing individuals together with little consultation would encourage them to work closely together. Many participants based this upon previous experiences. It was felt that a formal structure was required to facilitate the cementing of relationships within a co-located team. Many believed that issues such as job roles, salaries, status, in-group/out-group hostility and individual egos would prevent such a team from naturally bonding into a meaningful gestalt. Similar issues regarding multi-agency working have been raised previously (Moran, Jacobs, Bunn & Bifulco, 2007). The rationale for encouraging professionals to work more closely together was supported. However, the methods being implemented were not. For EPs who valued autonomy it was felt that co-located teams could serve to make them feel isolated and more inclined to focus on working independently.

It has been suggested that EPs have a number of distinctive roles that apply particularly to multi-agency work. These include introducing a psychological perspective, uncovering mediating variables, unravelling problem dimensions, using evidence-based recommendations and promoting big ideas (Cameron, 2006). Many of these distinctive contributions equate with aspects of the role that participants identified as providing job satisfaction. For instance, EPs talked about job satisfaction gained from problem solving, using “psychological theories”, seeing the “big picture” and confidence gained by using evidence-based research.

EPs are on the whole positive about multi-agency working (Gaskell & Leadbetter, 2009). There was enthusiasm from participants for being part of multi-agency teams although a significant number reported a lack of opportunity. Many felt that working closely with other professionals had always been an important part of the EP role. Support for multi-agency work focused on teams with a clear role and remit and where meaningful integration had taken place. EPs who were part of such teams felt this contributed to their job satisfaction. However, there was mixture of experience from EPs who had
been part of multi-agency teams. Negative experiences included a feeling that accountability was lost or diluted and that forming a meaningful and useful team was time consuming. Previous research has highlighted similar concerns (Anton, 2009; Doll, Acker & Goalstone, 2000). There was also a feeling that often too much time was devoted to discussion in multi-agency teams. It was reported that this impacted on delivering front line services particularly at a time when economic constraints were adding pressure. However, many reported that multi-agency teams brought richness to their work, gave insight in multiple perspectives and required the EP to be sure of their ground which helped reduce complacency. There was also a feeling that EPs were well placed to take leadership roles in multi-agency teams and that the psychological skills and understanding they had could be beneficial in facilitating groups.

The use of and development of professional language is an important area of research (Eisler, 2004). A high degree of scepticism and negativity was expressed about the use of language within multi-agency teams. Previous research had suggested that EPs were concerned that multi-agency working may lead to the implementation of protocols that are too broad to be useful (Moran, Jacobs, Bunn & Bifolco, 2007). This concern was also expressed by EPs in this study. It was felt that the desire for a common language between professionals in multi-agency teams could dilute a professions’ language that had evolved over years, captured complexities and subtleties and formed an important part of professional identity. It was suggested that as a specialization develops so does a specialist language. This is necessary and acts as a short cut to allow those who work within the specialization to carry out their work and discuss the nuances and technicalities of the role. There was a recognition of the need for professionals to be able to use a common language when working together. However, there was also a fear that multi-agency teams would require individuals to give up their professional language rather than become bilingual.

This fear appears to be well founded. Research clearly demonstrates that language is not merely a neutral, descriptive medium but has an active role in shaping and constructing how people view and experience the world (Tribe & Tunariu, 2009). Language carries meaning and gives us a sense of identity.
Professional language can be used to join or divide professions (Eisler, 2004). While a number of participants discussed pressure to “develop a common language” it appeared this may be a simplistic understanding of the issues. Critical reviews of multi-agency and multi-disciplinary team approaches show that team members often do not respect each other’s knowledge and language use (Flam, 2009). Rather than concentrating on developing a common language it is suggested that efforts would be better spent developing multiple perspective taking and respect for knowledge diversity within the teams (Flam, 2009). Rather than losing the nuances of specialist profession based terminology there is a need for greater awareness amongst staff from different professional groups and agencies of the meaning each assigns to commonly used terms (Salmon & Rapport, 2005). It may therefore be more beneficial to team members if time is spent developing a common consensus about language and meaning and continually negotiating this within multi-agency teams.

A number of participants appeared perplexed by the vigour with which multi-agency working had recently been pursued. This is because many felt that they had always worked in multi-agency ways. Many reported that co-ordinating and facilitating joint working and collating and sharing information had always the role of the EP. Therefore, many felt that Every Child Matters had had limited impact upon the profession. Some did however feel that formalising the work with initiatives such as the Common Assessment Framework and Team Around the Child meetings made multi-agency working easier. However, a sizable percentage of participants, particularly those in management roles, criticised the current way multi-agency working was implemented in their authority. Many claimed that it led to too many meetings, little co-ordination, “talking shops” and lack of focus or effective decision making. EPs were however complimentary about multi-agency relationships that they had formed. Many felt that they learned a lot from other professions and could often find a number of individuals from other professionals with whom they could work closely and constructively.

There remained a number of anxieties regarding the future of multi-agency working. Research has identified that EPs felt frustrated at barriers to further role expansion such as limited service capacity (AEP, 2008). EPs in this study
accepted that LAs financial resources were limited and that many LAs would be providing little more than core services for the foreseeable future. This made some question if it was best to form strong bonds with other professionals or view them as rivals. These fears centred on a belief that there was a new political will to encourage the growth of school academies and further devolve SEN finance directly to schools. Many also felt that initiatives such as Targeted Mental Health in Schools had resulted in a lessening of professional boundaries and was perceived as an encroachment by other professions into work historically carried out by EPs. There were concerns that these chances may favour professions who were more commercially savvy than had so far been demonstrated by EPs. Many EPs responded enthusiastically to George Miller's classic injunction to give psychology away (Kelly, Woolfson & Boyle, 2008). However in the 40 years since Miller’s address a more competitive climate has emerged where psychology is often re-packaged by others for commercial gain. Some may now therefore questioned whether such benevolence may present problems for a profession often viewed as underselling itself.

Multi-agency work enhanced feelings of professional identity, helped development of own skills and opportunities to work creatively in a wider range of contexts (Gaskell & Leadbetter, 2009). However, there was widespread anxiety that organisational changes, particularly with regard to multi-agency working, were potentially impacting on professional identity. Many felt that the LAs had an objectives of “forcing multi-agency working” rather than facilitating. There was recognition of psychological theories of change and the natural resistance that individuals tend to have to this. However, there were fears that the changes being implemented may result in generic multi-agency workers with no professional identity. A number of teams explained that they work to maintain strong bonds with their EP team members and maintain their professional identity but that this was becoming more of a challenge.

Individuals who identify strongly with their profession report that their professional group is an important source of satisfaction (Lewis & Crisp, 2004). Multi-agency teams in which professional identity is enhanced contain group members with positive attitudes towards multi-agency working and report a positive organizational climate (Robinson, Anning & Frost, 2005). Therefore,
the degree to which EPs feel they have a choice about the teams they join is likely to determine their attitudes and perceptions towards being in the team and their professional identity (Gaskell & Leadbetter, 2009). This may account for the high level of negativity expressed by some EPs about working closely with others. There was a strong feeling that the changes were being forced upon EPs by senior management rather than being negotiated. EPs had theories as to why this may be happening such as to “force professionals out their silos” and that senior management think it is “an efficient way of working”. However, the mechanism by which the changes were being implemented appeared to be fostering defensiveness and negativity. This seemed a missed opportunity as many of the same professionals claimed they had always worked closely with colleagues from a variety of professions and viewed this as an important aspect of their role.

5.6 Study strengths

A review of previous literature revealed that job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation for EPs have not been widely researched. Many studies are US based and focus on the work of SPs. As already established, the context in which US SPs and UK EPs work is significantly different. This study therefore focuses on a research area that has had little attention in the UK. The study does not try to address more than is possible and is realistic about the inability to generalise the results too widely. However, it provides a snapshot of the issues in the turbulent and changing context in which EPs currently work. As previously mentioned, the researcher comes from within the profession being studied. Therefore using inductive, explicit, thematic analysis allowed themes to emerge rather than be imposed and enabled the researcher to minimise personal bias.

By carrying out a pilot study the researcher gained a greater insight into effective ways to facilitate the data collection exercises. For instance, prior to the pilot the researcher had over thirty potential backup questions. However, the pilot enabled the researcher to focus on the most important areas and create space in future sessions to allow full discussion. Knowing that the participants would be enthusiastic to answer questions at length enabled the
facilitator to feel less anxious during the interviews. This then enabled the researcher to pay close attention to group dynamics and ensure that some of the more reserved participants’ voices were also captured during the focus group interviews.

5.7 **Study limitations**

Participant selection is an important consideration as it has a direct effect on the reliability and validity of the findings. Whenever possible it is important to establish access to participants through their peers rather than through people “above” or “below” them in their hierarchy (Seidman, 1991). However, as the researcher was unknown to many participants this was not possible. As there were no alternative means by which the researcher could gain access to the contact details of potential participants access had to be established via individuals in management positions.

The original intention was to ensure that data from individual interviews was not over-represented in the final analysis. While the researcher was mindful of this during the analysis it proved difficult to fully achieve. The number of interviews that took place was higher than originally anticipated. Each provided the participants more time for individual exploration of issues than may have been the case in a focus group. This therefore led to the generation of more data from interviews than focus groups. However, every effort was made to ensure that in the final analysis the data from management interviews was proportionate to the number of participants.

Unfortunately, in this study it was also necessary for all participants to be self referring. The initial aim of the research was to recruit participants from a range of services that operated in different ways. Unfortunately, recruitment proved difficult, possibly as a result of the anxiety and uncertainty felt within EPSs. Therefore, the local authority EPSs that agreed to take place were similar in structure. It could be argued that had EPSs in other geographical areas also been approached it may have been possible to identify a range of services with alternative structures. However, this did not occur due to pragmatic reasoning including financial and time constraints. It could be argued that it would therefore be unwise to assume the findings could be generalised to all EPSs in
England and Wales. While the conclusions may be internally valid the author would suggest that they have limited external validity. However, many of the changes to service experienced by the participants are a result of national changes. It is therefore likely that a proportion of the findings will resonate with EPs throughout England and Wales.

Educational Psychologists are busy professionals whose time is in short supply. Therefore, interviews and focus groups were time limited and only the most important aspects of job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation could be considered. Therefore factors such as relationships with colleagues at the same levels, continued professional development, the impact of experience and models of service delivery were not explored in as much detail as desired.

Being familiar with the Educational Psychology field can be both advantageous and disadvantageous. As the research was also a fellow professional to participants he was aware of many of the factors, issues and concerns discussed. This was useful in helping authenticate the findings. However, this familiarity is tempered by a heightened risk of the researchers own experiences and perspectives being projected onto the data. This was minimized by re-reading the original transcript if it was felt bias may influence the analysis and continually reflecting on this awareness throughout the analysis. The results were also discussed with the researcher’s doctoral supervisor. By these methods credibility was maintained.

When undertaking any research there are always issues that affect accuracy (validity) and repeatability (reliability). Due to the nature of doctoral study on a professional training course, the data were coded and themes identified by one researcher. Researcher triangulation with a colleague was not an option, as there was only one researcher. It was impractical to recruit someone with the necessary research experience to check the data for accuracy. While this were discussed during supervision it may have been advisable to explore more extensively ways to ensure a second coder was involved in the process. If this method were to be used in another study, it would be advisable to involve a number of researchers in the data collection, identification of themes and analysis of the data.
Triangulation was achieved by requesting participants to check the transcripts and initial themes. However, it is acknowledged that many of the participants are busy professionals and it is difficult to gauge how exhaustively the transcripts were checked. A number of replies were received from participants and some amendments made as a result. It is also worth noting that other forms of triangulation could not be attempted due to practical considerations. For instance it may also have been useful to have involved participants in the analysis and theme identification.

In a fast moving environment this research is likely to become a historical account quickly as events unfold and the delivery of EP services adjust. Themes change across time and it would be wrong to assume that the themes identified would necessarily be the same several years from now. This is particularly the case for this study given the pace with which the context in which EPs work is changing. However, generalization is not the main purpose of qualitative research. The aim of this research was to provide detailed analysis of the particular condition.

Lastly, there are a number of overlaps of themes still present in the final analysis. While this was significantly reduced during the thematic analysis stage, there remains a significant overlap of themes. However, one of the aims of the data collection sessions was to provide conditions that encouraged fluidity and free talk. A consequence of this is that participants themselves made links between themes. While this provided richness and insight into thought processes it made it difficult to fully separate themes during the analysis.

5.8 Implications for further research

It is suggested that future researchers in this area may wish to focus on one of three areas. Firstly, in this study EPs generally report having a strong internal “locus of evaluation” and linked this to autonomy and little need for approbation. However, this was questioned by some participants with one EP stating “It would be interesting to do a psychological experiment to see just how robust the educational psychologist impressions would be of their own work.” Further research that attempted to gauge the influence of others opinions on EPs
evaluations of their involvement would provide a more in-depth understanding of the role of approbation for the profession.

There also appeared to be anxiety and frustrations related to a perceived increase in EPs having to generate income via traded service teams potentially independent of the LAs. This linked to a belief that EPs have not traditionally been good at marketing themselves, a fear that other professions will encroach on EP work, questions over EPs’ distinctive contribution and ethical questions related to services not being free at the point of delivery. However, some EPs felt that as LA employees they may not be viewed as independent by parents, that there was an ethical case for independence and that LA bureaucracy stifled creativity and autonomy. This appears to be an area of great concern within the profession. It would therefore be useful to carry out action research with EPs to explore these issues further over the next few years as the profession continues to adapt to change.

Research suggests that strongly bonded teams perform better and can offer each other support (Klein, Diazgranados, Salas Le, Burke, Lyons & Goodwin, 2009). The current research suggests that those teams who work most closely together offered each other spontaneous approbation, had a greater understand of each other’s work and felt confident and comfortable asking for and receiving support from colleagues. However, other EPs reported that they work autonomously to the extent that other members of their own team were not always aware of the work they undertook. Some participants reported that they felt team cohesion was being eroded as some LAs attempted to enforce co-located and joint teams with individuals from a variety of professions. Some individuals also reported that professional identity was therefore under threat this may have a negative impact on job satisfaction. It would therefore be interesting to carry out research considering ways in which EP teams can retain strong bonds in light of the changes to services being implemented in a number of authorities.

5.9 Recommendations

Despite the limitations already highlighted this is still a potentially valuable and important study for the Educational Psychology professional in England and
Wales. The results of this study have implications for EPs working in LAs regardless of whether they are main grade, specialists, senior psychologists or principals. The following recommendations are aimed at individual, systemic and organisational levels. Some recommendations based on the findings should enable EPs to feel greater levels of job satisfaction and create opportunities for wider recognition and approbation.

From the research it appears that EPs desire freedom to exercise their professional judgement. As members of a profession that is now regulated by the Health Professions Council there are guidelines, procedures and codes of conduct that enable EPs to have a clear understanding of their professional responsibilities. However, it has been suggested that increasing accountability has led to a reduction in practitioner autonomy (Bouwkamp, 2009). A number of EPs felt this was happening within their service and expressed frustrations, citing bureaucracy, restrictions on creative thinking and a focus on key performance targets. One participant suggested that EPs should be independent of LAs. This may address the important issue of perceived independence from service providers for families of children with SEN. However, it may also enable EPs to feel they are able to employ a wider range of the skills for which they have been trained. This is particularly relevant following the recent change to doctorate level entry to the profession.

A second issue of concern for many EPs was the perceived lack of recognition or understanding of their work particularly by senior managers within the authority. EPs desire autonomy with recognition (Webster & Hoyle, 2000). Research demonstrates that praise for work carried out leads employees to display more creativity in their work as well as higher rates of motivation and job satisfaction (Wong & Ladkin, 2008). If EPs were to remain employees of LAs it would be important to explore ways of ensuring that their work was better recognised, understood and commented on than currently appears to be the case. However, if EPs were to be independent of LAs then the methods of gaining approbation would also change. One participant suggested that EPs should be retained for statutory work within an authority but work on a traded service model (possibly independently) for all other work. If EPs were required to trade in a commercial market then approbation would possibly link more to
the success of the enterprise, satisfaction of clients and feedback from colleagues. It may also provide autonomy, demand creativity in order to compete and provide opportunities to employ a wider range of skills.

Alternatively, if some EPs were to remain employed directly by LAs it may be prudent to consider the ways in which they are used. EPs reported frustrations associated with being part of processes over which they felt they had little influence. For LAs who are looking for new and more cost effective ways of working, EPs may be better employed working at a strategic level rather than necessarily working directly with schools. It has been suggested that there is a role for research in determining where EP input is most effective (AEP, 2008). From the current study it also appears that working at a strategic level within LAs may provide more opportunities for EPs to gain approbation from within the organisation. As doctoral level professionals EPs are amongst the most highly trained professionals in LAs. It would therefore seem sagacious to employ the full range of skills that they have to offer. For instance, they have the ability to evaluate and research approaches and interventions. By providing a strong evidence base for proposed ways of working they could contribute considerably to cost savings in LA education budgets.

From comments made by participants it also appears that there is a requirement for EPs to develop skills that as yet do not appear to be part of the core training. Participants discussed a need for EPs to become more media savvy and develop marketing, advertising and business skills. A well founded resistance to this was also expressed with concerns raised over ethical issues associated with cost and potentially servicing only those who can afford to pay. However, others expressed concerns that an inability to articulate EPs distinctive contribution and a failure to adapt and re-act to a more commercial existence will leave the profession vulnerable as other professions offer competing services. It was also suggested that ventures using a social enterprise model or charitable status could incorporate services free at the point of delivery for those who may otherwise be denied a service. Likewise it would seem injudicious to express frustrations that others do not inherently know what EPs can offer without being pro-active in addressing this. For a profession that values autonomy it would seem shrewd to develop skills that would help protect
and determine future direction rather than await wider developments and then be told where, if at all, EPs fit within new services. It may therefore be advisable for future doctoral training courses to include some foundation business and marketing skills focusing on offering independent services (i.e. court work) as part of the preparation for entry into the profession.

A number of participants also expressed frustrations that those they provide services for are not always clear of their own expectations and one consequence is that they are sometimes disappointed with the service provided. This then leads to a lack of approbation for EPs from clients. This same issue arises in the counselling profession. However, within this profession, part of the professional training involves spending a considerable amount of time exploring the complexities and subtleties of contracting with clients. This involves paying particularly attention to the emotional aspect, for client and practitioner, of what may at first appear to be analytical and functional agreements. This results in a much greater appreciation of the important functions that contracting encompasses. When addressing a single issue EPs are often contracting with multiple clients. It is therefore perhaps even more important that EPs are provided with extensive training in this complex area. This would leave EPs skilled to negotiate expectations and agree involvement (or not) at the outset.

**Conclusions**

This research has considered EPs views of the factors that influence job approbation, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction when working within multi-agency local authority contexts. In doing so it has attempted to address four questions.

1. What do EPs working for local authorities perceive as contributing to their job satisfaction?

2. What do EPs working for local authorities perceive as contributing to their job dissatisfaction?

3. How do EPs working for local authorities get approbation?
4. How is the re-organisation of local authorities affecting EP job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation?

EPs were able to identify a variety of factors that contributed to the three areas of approbation, satisfaction and dissatisfaction. It is probably not unreasonable to suggest that many of the expressed views could have been anticipated. Many areas resonated with existing literature although some unexpected themes emerged. However, it is perhaps the level of dissatisfaction that was expressed particularly in response the re-organisation of LAs that was the most unforeseen. This study is in some ways a snapshot of a profession in change. As such it is anticipated that if a similar study took place a decade from now, the concerns of EPs are likely to be very different. However, it can be concluded that as we move into a new era of austerity and cuts to LA services the anxieties, frustrations, and dissatisfactions identified by participants are likely to remain relevant and worthy of further consideration and debate for some time to come. It remains to be seen how the current trends will contribute to the future direction of the profession and how EPs in turn will respond to the challenges ahead.

REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix A  Recruitment letter to EPS managers

Mr / Ms X
Address
Address
Address

Dear X

DOCTORAL THESIS RESEARCH PROJECT

I am currently carrying out research commissioned by XXX Council for my doctoral thesis. The project will examine the factors that Educational Psychologists (EPs) feel contribute to their job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation within a changing multi-agency local authority context. Data will be gathered from focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Participants will be drawn from EPs (both trainees and qualified) employed by a number of local authorities.

I am writing to ask if your service would be willing to take part in this research? If so I would wish to carry out a focus group lasting no more than 45 minutes with between five and nine EPs sometime between April-August 2010. When carrying out previous focus group research, the data collection took place at the participating EPS's offices and was scheduled for immediately before or after team meetings. This seemed the most convenient place/time for participants.

Prior to the focus group I would also require a 45 minute semi-structured interview with you to discuss your perspective on the issues associated with the job satisfaction and approbation. This will enable me to give due consideration to the strategic and practical considerations involved in EP service delivery prior to conducting the focus groups. I would need to have completed this interview before September 2010.

Please could you complete the questions in the boxes below indicating if you would be willing to take part in this research. Please could I have your reply by XXXX. Please could you email me your response to XXX@XXX.gov.uk.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would be willing to participate in an interview to discuss EP job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be willing to allocate time/room for EPs in this EPS to attend a focus group to discuss job satisfaction and approbation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be willing to forward an email to EPs in this EPS requesting an expression of interest in the research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am willing to allow the interview to be audio recorded for research purposes</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Name:

Position:  Local Authority:

Yours sincerely,

XXXX

Educational Psychologist in Doctoral Training

X Educational Psychology Service
Appendix B  Focus group recruitment letter to EPs

Mr / Ms X
Address

Dear X

DOCTORAL THESIS RESEARCH PROJECT

I am currently carrying out research commissioned by XXX Council for my doctoral thesis. The project will examine the factors that Educational Psychologists (EPs) feel contribute to their job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation within a changing multi-agency local authority setting. Data will be gathered from focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Participants will be drawn from EPs (both trainees and qualified) employed by a number of local authorities.

Your local authority has expressed an interest in participating in this research. I am therefore writing to ask if you would be willing to take part in a focus group lasting no more than 45 minutes with between five and nine EPs sometime between June-October 2010. When carrying out previous focus group research, the data collection took place at the participating EPS’s offices and was scheduled for immediately before or after team meetings. This seemed the most convenient place/time for participants.

As part of the research I will also be interviewing the Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) or individual with PEP responsibilities within your authority. This will enable me contextuazle issues and gain a better understanding of the structure of your organization. All data collected from focus groups and interviews will be confidential. No data will be shared directly with your local authority and every effort will be made to ensure that participants cannot be directly identified.

Please could you complete the questions in the box below indicating if you would be willing to take part in this research. Please could I have your reply by XXXX. Please could you email me your response to XXX@XXX.gov.uk.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would be willing to participate in a focus group to discuss EP job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am willing to allow the focus group to be audio recorded for research purposes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Job Title: | Local Authority: |

Yours sincerely,

XXX

Educational Psychologist in Doctoral Training

XXX Educational Psychology Service
Appendix C Participant Information Sheet

Educational Psychologists’ views of factors that influence job approbation, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction when working within multi-agency local authority contexts.

Participant Information Sheet
You are being invited to take part in a research study for a doctoral dissertation. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?
XXX.

Title of the Research
Educational Psychologists’ views of factors that influence job approbation, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction when working within multi-agency local authority contexts.

What is the aim of the research?
The research questions are as follows:

1. What do EPs working for local authorities perceive as contributing to their job satisfaction?
2. What do EPs working for local authorities perceive as contributing to their job dissatisfaction?
3. How do EPs working for local authorities get approbation?
4. How is the re-organisation of local authorities affecting EP job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation?

Why have I been chosen?
A number of Educational Psychology Services in the XXX have been approached to take part in the research. This is to ensure that a wide range of experiences are considered.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?
You will be asked to take part in a 30-45 minute interview or focus group. You will be invited by the researcher to answer a range of questions related to job satisfaction and approbation.

What happens to the data collected?
The data will be thematically analysed using mindjet mindmanager software. Thematically organised data will be sent back to participants to enable them to check the accuracy. All data will be held in encrypted password protected files and destroyed after five years.
How is confidentiality maintained?
The data collected will not be confidential as it will be used to compile a research report that would be shared with others. However all data collected will be anonymised, will not be shared directly with the service. When the data is sent back to the participant for a member check the participant has the right to ask for any section that they feel may identify them directly to be removed.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?
There will be no payment or out of pocket expenses for participation. The researcher will arrange to carry out the research at a location convenient to the participant.

What is the duration of the research?
30-45 minute interview or focus group.

Where will the research be conducted?
At a location convenient for the participant.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?
The research will be published as part of a doctoral thesis.

Criminal Records Check (if applicable)
The researcher is employed by a local authority as an Educational Psychologist in Training and as such has full CRB clearance.

Contact for further information
XXXXXX

What if something goes wrong?
If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with members of the research team, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Coordinator by either writing to XXXX.
Appendix D  Consent form

Educational Psychologists' views of factors that influence job appropation, job satisfaction & dissatisfaction when working within multi-agency local authority contexts.

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to any treatment/service.

3. I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded.

4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.

5. I agree that any data collected may be passed to other researchers.

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Signature</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of person taking consent</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Signature</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

I agree to take part in the above project.
**Appendix E Six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases of thematic analysis</th>
<th>Description of process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Familiarising myself with my data</td>
<td>Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generating initial codes</td>
<td>Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Searching for themes</td>
<td>Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reviewing themes</td>
<td>Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Defining and naming themes</td>
<td>Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Producing the report</td>
<td>The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix F 15 point checklist of criteria for a good thematic analysis

(Braun & Clarke, 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transcription</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for ‘accuracy’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Each data item has been equal attention in the coding process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>All relevant extracts for each theme have been collated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Themes are internally coherent, consistent and distinctive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Data have been analysed - interpreted, made sense of – rather than just paraphrased or described.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Analysis and data match each – the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Analysis tells a convincing and well-organised story about the data and topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written report</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>The assumptions about thematic analysis are clearly explained.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>There is a good fit between what you claim you do and what you show that you have done.</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>The researcher is positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just ‘emerge’.</td>
</tr>
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Appendix G  
Focus group & interview questions

1. What gives you job satisfaction?

2. What if anything do you find dissatisfying about your job?

3. How do EPs get recognition and appreciation for their work?

4. How has the re-organisation of local authorities impacted on your job satisfaction, dissatisfaction and approbation?

5. How is the specific expertise and knowledge of EPs recognised and used within your authority?

6. What impact if any has legislation from the past decade had on your practice and perceived job satisfaction?

7. What are your views on work/life balance for EPs?

8. How do you feel those you work with/for perceive EPs?

9. What impact do the perceptions of others have on your job?

10. What impact if any has multi-agency working had on working as an EP?
Appendix H  Mind Map from a data collection session

Job Satisfaction

Feedback

Personality

Locus of Evaluation

Relationships

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My personal opinion about what is affirming is that positive feedback from people who are experts or professionals, particularly if they say what it is that I have done well, is something specific and meaningful. It gives me a sense of pride and accomplishment. It would feel more affirming if the feedback was more specific and personal. I feel that if someone is giving specific feedback, they must have noticed something particular about my work. The feedback makes me feel validated and reinforces what I believe I am good at.

I don’t work for the management. I work for the people. I feel that we are all on the same team, and I want to help my colleagues succeed. I want to contribute to the success of my team and feel that my opinion and feedback are valued by others.

I don’t work for the authority. I work for the people. I feel that authority is important in some situations, but I also value the opinions of my colleagues. I think it’s important to listen to others and consider their perspectives. I feel that I can provide valuable feedback that is helpful to others.

I don’t work for the management. I work for the people. I feel that it’s important to work together and support each other. I think it’s important to have a positive and collaborative environment, and I feel that my colleagues share this outlook.

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In this particular team various colleagues have had experience of having periods of being part of multidisciplinary teams. There are members of the team who have been in teams that have not been integrated. Not necessarily seen as integrated but not necessarily everybody that parts of the multidisciplinary team, so that actually didn’t have a functional change. Anyway, it was a change for the better and I have been part of a couple of these and one of them came before every child matters. So it wasn’t purely for the legislation that made it happen, it was driven by satisfaction. In other words, what being part of a multidisciplinary team contributed to my job satisfaction as an educational psychologist? Yes, it would solve the right team. Given that it wouldn’t be a static definite everywhere. Well, I mean there is good research showing what makes a very good team. If one thing in there is where a manager has a clear vision, team members who get to know each other, etc., if those things are in place, then it is very rewarding and enjoyable to work in a multi-agency team.

Oh, yes, I have worked in a very good multi-agency teams. Yes, I have enjoyed working in teams. I would make the observation that it isn’t necessarily always been great, but when it has been good.

For me, it is not working in a multi-agency team per se that makes it different. I think it is more the opportunity for engagement, challenge, doing something different. As you develop, as you grow, as you are feeling very much better about yourself, it is a good feeling to be able to work in a more cohesive way.

You have to work with other people differently. I think that is the sort of it. I was a social worker in the UK and I worked closely with social workers when there were very few of us, and it was just, we were not an integral part of the team, but we were working closely with the team and with social workers. As a social worker, I would say that I learned a lot from social workers, very well and I was a part of the team, I was a part of the team, and that’s just how it was. Speech and language therapists were in the building with us, so a child psychologist was down the road. We were doing joint family therapy, and a child psychologist was there.

So, I think that in a multi-agency team it isn’t just true.

But I have assumed that the legislation of the past few years have been beneficial to children and families. It might have some time passed or not had the intended outcome, but I think that there has been a political will to improve the lives of children, and I feel greatly for that political will to ensure the current government.

If it’s really not too much between psychologists, but between educational psychologists and health psychologists, and between educational psychologists and health psychologists. So being a system where the powers that be in whatever way, are in contact and they start working together. It is just a message that we cannot be bothered with this and not even interested. It doesn’t mean a great deal, but it just needs to be brought up.

I make the observation that there is shortage of places for training educational psychologists, and that we are now in the UK, and that the training places are scarce, and that the training places are scarce, and that the training places are scare. I think that it is important that we have people who are not actually really valued,

a sense in which I feel a sense of professional job satisfaction is undoubtedly core to how they do things, and a lack of professional job satisfaction is related to educational psychologists. So being a system where the powers that be in whatever way, are in contact and they start working together. It is just a message that we cannot be bothered with this and not even interested. It doesn’t mean a great deal, but it just needs to be brought up.
I think there are two main reasons for job satisfaction: first, personal growth, and second, job satisfaction. Personal growth can be seen in terms of career advancement, job security, and financial stability. Job satisfaction can be seen in terms of work-life balance, job security, and personal fulfillment. Both are important, but I believe personal growth is more important.

Others perceptions

Approval

Frustations

I think that the first one is more important, as I think that job satisfaction is more about the immediate rewards of the job, while personal growth is more about the long-term benefits. However, both are important, and we should strive to achieve both.

I think that the second one is more important, as I think that job satisfaction is more about the social aspects of the job, while personal growth is more about the individual aspects. However, both are important, and we should strive to achieve both.

While lack of resources is a frustration, you have a strong voice about what you portray in your work. It is important that you have a strong voice about what you portray in your work, as it is important that you have a strong voice about what you portray in your work. It is important that you have a strong voice about what you portray in your work.

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